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GUILDEROY

BY

OUIDA



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1889

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PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
LONDON

823

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GUILDEROY.

CHAPTER XX.

THE only person, besides her father, who saw her wholly at her best, and quite as she was, was Aubrey. In great receptions, in large house parties, in all the crowd and movement of fashionable life, she was always glad to see him come to her side, and to feel the shield of his kindly friendship placed between her and the impertinences of fine ladies and the embarrassing homage of men, who, seeing that she was neglected, made sure that she could be consoled. He did much for her that Guilderoy had never dreamed of doing, and would not have had patience to do if he had. He gave her many indications of all that she needed to know in the bewildering mazes of fashion and precedence. He got for her the good will of many persons of power and influence. He

explained to her many things which astonished and troubled her, and he made her London receptions successful and distinguished. The world obeyed any hint from him eagerly, and all his social power, which was vast, he put out on behalf of his cousin's wife.

‘Nothing would enrage and estrange Evelyn so greatly as to find her a social failure,’ he thought very often, ‘and yet he will not take the trouble to stretch out his little finger to prevent her being one.’

And what his cousin failed to do, Aubrey did.

‘It is a little like Achilles spinning for me to interfere in these things,’ he said with a smile, as he corrected her invitation list, explained to her questions of precedence, and told her why one duchess was a great sovereign revered by all society, and another duchess was a mere dowdy whose word nobody attended to or asked. All these things were trifles which were wholly insignificant in his sight, occupied as he was with the great cares of public life; but from his birth and position he was familiar with them; he knew their power to make or mar a woman's entry into the great world,

and he had power to control all their mysterious influences ; and all that it was necessary for her to know and avoid, she learned from him.

‘ Evelyn should do all this for you,’ he said to her once. But his cousin did not, and never would have done, so Aubrey did it for him.

He knew that Guilderoy would never pardon a woman who bore his name if she did not attain eminence in society. Guilderoy imagined that he attached no value to social opinion, and weighed nothing in its scales. But he deceived himself in that as in many another estimate of his feelings, and unless the purest silver had possessed the hall mark he would never have rated it as silver.

‘ You are very kind to Gladys,’ he said to his cousin once or twice, but he was never aware of all that he owed to Aubrey ; and that if his wife received princes and princesses with a perfect manner, if she filled her houses with the best and only the best people, if she never made an error in the date of a title, or a mistake in the smaller intricacies of etiquette and precedence, it was due entirely to the man who sometimes, for the first time in his life, was late at a Cabinet Council, or tardy in speaking

before a division, because he had been giving lessons in social policy to John Vernon's daughter.

‘These are all very little things, both you and I consider,’ said Aubrey to her. ‘Yes, they are indeed the absurdest of trifles, and it is perhaps wonderful that a society on the brink of disintegration, as English society is, should still make so much of them. But it is just the knowledge of them, or the ignorance of them, which marks a woman of the world from a parvenue. Guilderoy wishes you to be a woman of the world, so omit nothing which is necessary to the education of the world. Besides, I confess that social etiquette has a certain value, if only in the maintenance of some standard for manners; I wish in some things that we had more of it; I wish it were not possible for an American adventuress to entertain the Prince of Wales, or for an English brewer to be hoisted into the House of Lords because he has made money by brewing, and been useful in elections. I know this latter possibility has been called the strength of England; but it has, on the contrary, been and is her very greatest weak-

ness. For it has made social life a hotbed for aspiring toadyism, has made political life a manure heap for the propagation of mushroom nobility, and has enabled a minister to force measures on the country which the country disapproves, because he can bribe his supporters by the whispered promise of peerages. If new peers must be made, it would be better to call up all the Victoria Cross men to the Upper House than to make nobility ridiculous by conferring it on tradesmen. The Victoria Cross men would at least allow of some sort of analogy to the old reasons for knighthood.'

Gladys always listened and followed him with sincere interest when he spoke of these things. Her father had been used to converse with her at times on serious and public matters, and all the problems of government and history possessed much more interest for her than the fashionable frivolities of the hour.

'It will be time to think of politics twenty years hence,' said Guilderoy to her, but she thought of them already, and often went to the Speaker's gallery to hear Aubrey.

He spoke well; not with any great

brilliancy of rhetoric, but with admirable lucidity and logic, great force of persuasion, great power of invective held in calm reserve, and that tone of perfect courtesy and scholarship which have been, until the last dozen years, the distinguishing glory of the House of Commons.

‘Why do *you* never speak?’ she asked once of Guilderoy, who answered impatiently :

‘It is of no use to speak in the Lords. Besides, I have never spoken. If I were to rise now they would think I had gone mad. It is of no kind of use to enter political life unless one has been trained by having passed one’s early years in the Commons. I could never have had that parliamentary education. I succeeded my father when I was a child of five years old.’

‘But you have great talents, they all say? My father says so, too!’

‘I am not sure that I have any. The world and your father are too complimentary to me. But I have at all events the common sense not to spoil my whole life by efforts for which I am wholly unfitted, and which would be assuredly wholly unprofitable.’

‘Aubrey’s are not unprofitable?’

‘I should not venture to say they were, but I am quite sure he is not such a blind optimist as to be satisfied with their results. Parliamentary government is the best machine that was ever constructed for grinding down superiority into mediocrity; that is why it is so immensely popular with the middle classes.’

‘But if you believe in an oligarchy, you might at least support that if you were conspicuous in public life?’

‘I never said I believed in it, my dear. All I am entirely convinced of is that the power of no man, whether Aubrey or another, will check permanently the gradual breaking up of England, which is being brought about by the inevitable decadence into which all nations fall.’

‘I do not like to think it.’

‘No one likes it; but our liking or our disliking will not alter the philosophy of history.’

‘But do you not feel that our own lives lead to it? Do you not see that society is so foolish, so extravagant, so selfish, so crowded, that it must make those outside of it despise it even while they envy it? You have said

yourself that there is neither elegance nor dignity in it, only an immense expenditure, and a feverish hurry. You have said yourself that instead of Mæcenas we have a nobility which sends its libraries and its picture galleries to the auction-room; which, rather than give up its racing and betting, its foreign baths and its London excesses, will see its old houses stripped, or its woods felled, or its collections bought by the Jews. I have heard you say that, or similar things, a thousand times.'

'Certainly, my dear; and does any Cuyp out of Ladysrood, any Gainsborough out of this house, go to Christie's through me? I have never cut a stick of timber which it was not absolutely needful to cut for the health and the growth of the woods themselves. When I have been pressed for money, which has happened, though my income is large, I have never sold my family Holbeins nor my ancestral oaks. I have a very strong sense that *noblesse oblige*, though I have not, I admit, the virtues of my cousin Aubrey.'

He spoke with some irritation, and for the first time a vague sense of annoyance, at the opinion she had of Aubrey, stirred in him.

‘He and I,’ he continued, ‘have always been the industrious and the idle apprentices in the eyes of our families. He early chose Athene and I Venus. But though I grant he has the monopoly of the virtues, yet I have an ounce of conscience left I assure you, and all that I have inherited will pass out of my hands as it came into them, intact to your children.’

She resigned the argument; she could not press on him the fact that his life was utterly self-indulgent, however free it might be from the avarice or the indignity which allowed others to send their household goods to the market.

‘Who has filled your head with these fancies of utility?’ he said, irritably. ‘Your father or my cousin? What a singular thing it is that when nine hundred and ninety-nine women out of a thousand only ask to enjoy themselves, I should have married the one in a thousand who knows nothing of enjoyment!’

And he left her with some impatience. She could neither persuade nor allure him, because she possessed no influence upon him.

‘She will be all her life that most de-

pressing thing, a conscientious woman!’ he thought with a smile and a sigh as he drove to his favourite club. ‘If she had married Aubrey she would have been a million times happier, and I——’

What would he have done? Would he have remained at the feet of the only woman whom he had ever loved with any love approaching a strong passion? He was not sure; but what we might have done almost always looks to us so much fairer than what we have done.

He did full justice to his wife’s mind and character; he even in theory admired them, but in actual fact he was only bored by them. She had not known how to interest and divert him; she was transparently truthful, full of high ideals and high thoughts, and possessed with the terrible earnestness of youth; but she only wearied him, and a woman far her inferior, morally and mentally, would have had far more power to move him when she wished if she had only had more pliability and more gaiety of temperament. He required to be amused as a petulant and spoilt child requires it. There were always countless women ready

to do it ; he went to them and left Aubrey to bring blue books and explain international law to his wife.

‘It is his *métier*!’ he said with some contempt. He did not perceive, because he did not study her enough to see it, that what prevented her from having such enjoyment of life as would have been in accordance with her nature and her age was the sense, perpetually weighing on her, that he regretted his hasty marriage.

She felt that she was a burden on him ; and though she never said it, its consciousness was ever present with her.

The existence of incessant change which she perpetually led gave her rather sadness and bewilderment than pleasure. The few months they remained in the London house, the few weeks spent at Ladysrood, the changes from Paris to Venice, to Cannes, to Aix, to Baden, according to the season of the year and the moods of fashion, gave her a sense of homelessness and restlessness which were not suited to her temperament. Life did not seem to her spent aright in this mere succession of display and distraction, this indolent and self-in-

dulgent pursuit of the appetites and senses. She was afraid of seeming 'odd' in her world; for he told her that people were so soon considered so, and always detested as a consequence. She did her best to endeavour to seem amused at this perpetual carnival; but she could not bring herself to feel so. Her early education had left too indelible a stamp of simplicity and gravity upon her for her to easily adopt the tone of those around her. Sometimes Guilderoy saw, or thought he saw, a look of disdain for his pursuits and pastimes come upon her features, and it angered him extremely. He thought it a censure of himself.

'My sister's frown was quite enough in the family,' he said once petulantly.

'Did I frown?' said Gladys, very sorrowfully. 'I did not know it. Indeed I am very sorry.'

'You frown very often,' he said angrily. 'Perhaps you do not know it. It is an ugly habit, and makes people think you a prude.'

'I see a great deal in society that I do not like,' she said, a little coldly.

'And pray, my dear, did it never occur to you that neither age nor experience have as yet

qualified you to act as duenna to a naughty world ?’

She coloured at the ridicule in his accent.

‘About some things I am sure I am right,’ she said in a low tone, which sounded to him like obstinacy. ‘One wants no duenna to know that there are some things which are—which offend one—one feels them.’

‘*You* feel them because your heart is always behind your beehives and sweetbriar at Christslea, and you think every one should talk like your father, with equal parts of St. Augustine and Horace. You are a country mouse at heart, and are always sighing for the hayricks. How I do wish you were not ! It makes the women detest you and laugh at you ; and it does not suit your style at all. You look a great lady, not a Phyllis or Amaryllis.’

‘They may laugh if they please,’ she said, with the look on her face with which she had once said that the Cherriton lads might burn the hut down if they pleased.

‘But that is just what they must not do,’ said Guilderoy, considerably irritated. ‘Nothing offends or annoys me more ; nothing is so odious as the ridicule by women of a

woman. She never recovers it. It is much less injurious to her to be calumniated than to be laughed at. The greatest beauty cannot stand it.'

'It is wholly indifferent to me!'

'But it is not to me,' said Guilderoy. '*Le ridicule tue*. It kills grace, it kills charm, it kills popularity. It would afflict me immeasurably if for want of a little flexibility you were considered a precisian in the world. It is Hilda's style, I am aware, but it is a most uncomfortable style, most depressing in its effect upon others, and not at all the style of our day.

'*Une société gangrenée!* Oh, we know all that; it has been said admirably by Balzac, and more or less since by all his imitators,' continued Guilderoy, impatiently. 'It is really not necessary, my love, that you should either preach or philosophise about it. There are always numbers of writers and wits who make their livelihood by repeating all that kind of thing as well as it can be said; and I am myself convinced that no amount of condemnation will ever alter matters by a hand's breadth—not even condemnation so weighty and so terrible as yours!'

She coloured, mortified by the words and by their tone. She felt that in his eyes she was always the same country child who had first opened the little wicket for him under the boughs at Christslea. She had grown a century older in her own feelings; she was greatly changed in the eyes of all others; but in his sight she was always the same young and unworldly rustic, who had known no society beyond that of the fisherfolk on the shore and the wild creatures of the moorlands and orchards.

He had no patience to discuss her opinions; he could not see why she should have any. This disdainful relegation of her to an utterly inferior place in intelligence, in its strong contrast with the reverential sympathy of Aubrey, gave her a passionate sense of offence, which was too deep to be easily expressed.

‘He thinks me a fool,’ she felt bitterly; and she knew that she was not one, that she could have met him on equal ground if he had deigned to so encounter her.

She was silent.

‘English society,’ he continued, ‘has undergone the most radical revolution in its tone

and temper as well as in its politics ; it has put seven-leagued boots on in the ways of demoralisation as well as democracy. It is much more than fast, it is constantly outrageous. We have always been a very profligate nation, though we have professed great chastity ; and in this generation the impudent people are uppermost, and they have moulded a society to their liking, and every one who is not of it is nowhere.'

'Do you desire that I should be of it?'

'Of course not, my dear child. Why will you suggest absurdities? You do not wait to hear my conclusion. I was about to say that modern society, being no longer high-bred, but only "smart," no longer distinguished, but only rich, as immoral as it can possibly be, and having even ceased to be able to tell a gentlewoman from a *cabotine* when it sees one, good manners are altogether thrown away upon it, and it only laughs at them.'

'Its laughter must be less degrading than its praise!'

'That is the sort of thing which you are always saying and for which they detest you. I am not estimating its praise. I am wholly

indifferent to it. But I assure you that your scornful dignity and your delicate susceptibilities are as out of place in it as the silver ewer that the royal fugitives carried with them on the road to Varennes.'

'Silver vessels seemed natural to them, I suppose.'

'Yes; and so the silver of seriousness and high-breeding are natural to you. But it is the people with the pitchforks and the false assignats that are now blocking the roads of society everywhere, and though you cannot help being royal, you may as well smile when you can.'

He could not say to her what he really wished to convey, that her lack of animation and interest made women laugh at her, and laugh at him because they believed her jealous of his attentions to them; and the unconscious disapprobation often spoken in her eyes of the society which most amused him was a constant theme of raillery against him with his female friends.

Material sorrows every one can understand, though even these every one does not stay to pity; but the sorrows of the spirit, when combined with material prosperity, hardly any one

has patience to contemplate. Cold, hunger, and ill-health, all these wants and pains physical, are easily comprehended even by the unsympathetic ; but the cold of the soul which is solitary, the hunger of the heart which vaguely misses and vaguely desires what it has never yet found, the ill-health of the spirit which is weary and yet restless, which sits at the banquets of the world without appetite, and turns away from all which delights others, cloyed and yet empty, this no one will ever pity ; the multitude only calls it in a man cynicism, and in a woman ennui. And yet how far it is from being either one or the other !

She was too young to know the charm of toleration, the wisdom of indifference, the force of an influence which is never urged but merely suggested. Her character had been constructed by her father's teachings on a few broad lines ; the lines on which were built the characters of a simpler, graver, calmer day than ours, when women stayed at home whether in palace or in cabin. It had strength, truth, candour, honour, purity ; but, like many such characters, it lacked pliancy, sym-

pathy, and comprehensiveness. It adhered to its own few firm rules, and did not allow for, because it did not in any measure perceive, the caprices, the necessities, and the weaknesses of others.

There is a fatal law which philosophers might possibly trace out to some law of compensation, which usually makes the woman of perfect purity and candour incapable of that charm of quickly comprehending and infinitely pardoning which makes a woman most sweet and most beloved.

CHAPTER XXI.

AUBREY'S sister, the Duchess of Longleat, was one of those who make *la pluie et le beau temps* in the great world for those she disapproved or favoured. She had conceived at first a violent dislike to Gladys because 'no one knew her'—darkest of all social crimes! But Aubrey took infinite pains to reconcile her, and to secure her kindness and support to Guilderoy's wife.

'Why should you care whether she is admired or detested?' his sister asked him once; and he replied:

'I care because I pity her infinitely; she is married to a man who will never pardon her if she fails to succeed in his world, and who yet will never take the trouble to point out to her the way to succeed.'

'It is a dangerous occupation to do it for him,' said his sister. 'She is extremely handsome.'

‘Not dangerous to me,’ said Aubrey with a rather sad smile. ‘You know I am *bien trempé*.

‘To Evelyn to have his wife a mere country nonentity,’ he continued, ‘a woman who makes blunders and is quoted in ridicule because she sends in the wrong people together, would be infinitely more intolerable than to have her a Medea or a Lady Macbeth. She knows nothing of social matters. How should she? She is a child, and she has always lived in a cottage with a recluse. But some one must teach them to her. Hilda Sunbury ought, but she will not; virtuous woman though she is, she would be delighted at everything which would separate her brother from his wife. Evelyn will not because he is too indolent, and he has moreover no patience with people to whom these things are not a second nature. There only remain yourself or myself. We must undertake her training in these things.’

‘I really do not see why,’ said the Duchess. ‘Evelyn is an unconscionable egotist. He has always been so; he always will be. We are not bound to remedy the omissions of his selfishness.’

But she adored her brother, and to please him threw over the new-comer the mighty ægis of her approbation and protection. The world always followed her Grace of Longleat like sheep.

‘The Duchess of Longleat thinks her perfect,’ was a phrase with which those who wished ill to Gladys were easily silenced. Against the opinion of that greatest of great ladies there was no appeal.

Guilderoy meanwhile went on his own way, not taking any notice of the means by which his wife’s social success was secured. He was often absent in Paris, in Italy, at German baths, or in Austrian country houses, and his wife was quickly becoming not of much more serious import to him than the chests of old Stuart and Tudor plate locked up at Ladysrood. He prized the plate certainly, and would have been indignant and humiliated if thieves had broken in and stolen it. But it was scarcely ever in his thoughts. He trusted its safe keeping to that good fortune which had attended him from his birth.

He had, by degrees, glided back into his old habits, his old amusements, his old attentions

to women ; and he never looked intently or fondly enough at her to become aware of a certain look which was in her eyes when they followed him which might have told him that she was neither a child nor a saint, neither impassive nor forgiving. He only thought her of a cold temperament, and was glad.

She vaguely yet painfully felt that she had been deceived by the grave and tender sentiments which he had expressed so constantly before marriage with her, and which were now never heard of from him. He seemed utterly to have forgotten all the poetic and romantic views with which he had captivated her childish imagination ; and she thought that they had been entirely assumed to attract her. She did him wrong. He had been quite sincere in his moods of serious and ardent fancy when he had been first under the charm of Christslea. He had affected nothing ; he had been actually, for the time being, the imaginative and serious lover which he had seemed to be. He was a man wholly surrendered to the influence of the moment, and taking all his colour from it.

Very soon after his union with her, the habitual influences of his life had begun to

reassume their force over him ; the poetry and earnestness which had never been more than momentary with him had ceded place in turn to the instincts and modes of thought more common to him. He had never been insincere, although he appeared so to her. He had been merely following the whims and emotions of a season ; and when she ceased to have any power over him, the kind of feelings which she had temporarily aroused faded with the fading of her charm. His sister had been wholly correct in saying that his fancy for his wife had only been in feeling an *amourette* like many another, and it had no more enduring weight with him. But in all this he was not false, although he seemed to her to be so. He followed his own varying moods, and if she became of but slight account in his existence, it was because he honestly forgot that she ought to be of any.

But all these complications and vacillations of character were too intricate for her to follow ; and she only felt a continually growing sense that she had been intentionally deceived by him when he had wooed her with the graceful and chivalrous kind of homage which had won her

young heart under the red autumn leaves of the Christslea orchards. The world forever claimed him ; and he went to its claims willingly.

He could not live without stimulant, distraction, movement, excitement ; they were all drugs indispensable to his existence ; and in the fumes of them such an idyl as had smiled at him for a moment amongst the autumn flowers of Christslea had no chance to retain its spell. He had been quite sincere in it ; as sincere as when he had assured her father that he sighed for the nude and childlike soul of a virgin love. He had not conscientiously played a part ; because he had believed that the part was his own whilst he had played it. But this was too subtle for her comprehension ; she only saw that the man who had wooed her did not exist in the man who had wedded her.

In him as in many another man of intelligence and imagination, the mingled fever and conventionality of modern life had made both imagination and intelligence mere occasional factors in his thoughts and character ; frittered away and hurried away by the ever-pressing crowd of baser instincts and more material interests and pleasures.

In all the wishes and fancies for a more poetic existence, and for more innocent affections, which he had expressed to her, and to her father, in the weeks preceding his marriage, he had been his own dupe ; and had deluded himself with a mirage of his own creating. The mirage had faded ; but the obligations he had taken on himself when under the charm of it remained behind it.

Now and then, indeed, he felt with a pang that he did not keep his promise to John Vernon in either the spirit or the letter. ‘*Et puer est, et nudus Amor,*’ he had said when sitting under the porch at Christslea ; but the divine nudity of the innocent soul had soon seemed to him of little charm, and he had wished it draped and veiled with those arts which heighten what they hide. He knew, in his own consciousness, that every word which Vernon had predicted had been verified. He had sought those who threw the sulphur on the fading or on the rising flame. Often he sought them in spheres far removed from the knowledge or observation of his wife. But at times the women who beguiled him were amidst those of her own world.

There was a new star risen over London society in the third year of his marriage. It was a lady familiarly called by all her male friends Olive Shiffton : a very pretty woman, with the undulating form and the voluptuous grace of an odalisque, combined with an impudence which was almost heroic, and a success only possible in the senility and sensuality of society at the close of this century. Mrs. Shiffton had come no one very well knew whence. Her husband had a large Australian fortune, and she herself was vaguely said to be 'a lawyer's daughter,' which, as Lady Sunbury observed, was satisfactory, no doubt, but vague, comprising as it did everything whatever from the Lord Chancellor down to the lowest attorney of Smoke Street. Be she what she would, she was lovely to look at, had caught the eye and amused the ennui of an exalted personage, and had, by audacity, cringing, and cleverness, placed herself in the highest rank of society. Some great ladies still did not know her, indeed, but they were the exception. Mrs. Percy Shiffton was really seen 'everywhere.'

She laid siege to Guilderoy, and succeeded

in beguiling him. She amused him infinitely, quite as much by what she was not as by what she was. Her constant endeavour to persuade herself and everybody that she had been born in the purples was a perpetual comedy to him ; whilst the great rarity of her peculiar loveliness, which was that of a Créole rather than of an Englishwoman, had a potent seduction for his senses.

‘ Do not even think of that odious woman ; I do not even know her,’ said the Duchess of Longleat to Gladys ; but Gladys could not but see the power possessed and exercised by this person whom she met at every turn and in every house except at that of Her Grace of Longleat, at Balfrons, and at Illington. The very exclusion of the lady from the houses of his relatives served to suggest to her the terms of intimacy existing between Guilderoy and Olive Shiffton.

‘ It is only his way ; he is always flirting like that ; it means nothing,’ whispered the Duchess to her once at a great ball at Grosvenor House, where Guilderoy, half amused, half bored, was sitting out four dances under the shadow of tropical plants by the side of Olive Shiffton.

‘Why do you not flirt too, you goose? That would bring him to his senses,’ thought the Duchess. But she had too much of the good nature of the Balfrons blood to make the suggestion, and she had great respect for the self-control with which a woman so young as Gladys succeeded in restraining all evidence of suspicion or indignation.

‘It is not Olive Shiffton that she need care about,’ said Lady Sunbury to her. ‘He will play with her a season—half a season—nothing more. There are greater dangers than that, if she only could understand them.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked the Duchess.

‘I mean that all these caprices do not really matter. What does matter is the only woman he has ever really loved, or, to my belief, will ever really love.’

‘Beatrice Sorìa?’ asked the Duchess. ‘But I thought that was all broken off long ago?’

‘My dear Ermyntrude,’ replied Lady Sunbury, ‘there are plants which only grow the stronger for being broken off; any gardener will tell you that. He was in Italy this spring, and you know Sorìa is dead.’

‘Certainly he was in Italy, and certainly Sorìa is dead ; but it does not follow——’

‘How can you say so? Oh! if there were nothing more truly dangerous than the Olive Shifftons of society we should not all suffer as we do.’

‘Well, do not suggest it to Gladys. Here, if anywhere, ignorance is bliss.’

‘I am not a mischief-maker,’ replied Lady Sunbury with hauteur and dignity.

‘I am afraid you are, sometimes,’ thought Ermyntrude Longleat ; and she communicated her apprehensions to her brother.

‘I do not think there is any danger from the Duchess Sorìa,’ he answered. ‘She is a very proud woman. Proud women cannot be discarded one day and freshly won the next.’

‘Oh, my dear, if she be still in love with him!’ said his sister, who did not see much security in this barrier.

Meantime Gladys was only very dimly aware of the causes for jealousy which were given her. She did not understand enough of the world or of the persons in it to be conscious of how much she might have to resent.

She felt that her husband cared but little about her ; she was sensible that his life contained numerous interests, friendships, and amusements in which she had no part, and of which she had scarcely any knowledge ; but the complete innocence of her childhood hung too long about her like a golden mist not to be as yet a veil which blinded her to much. She had no comprehension of men's natures. Her father had tried to suggest their faults and follies to her, but her mind had not embraced the extent of his meaning. Only very slowly, little by little, as months succeeded months, did she begin to comprehend the vast difference between what was and what seemed to be, in the world in which she found herself, and realised the vast extent to which unacknowledged affections and influences have in it a greater potency than those which are visible and avowed.

In her ignorance she had fancied that, because she was his wife, Guilderoy would for ever prefer her to all others ; she learned that it was rather almost all others whom he preferred to herself. He was, indeed, never unkind to her, or otherwise than courteous.

The greatest want of kindness which he ever showed was in a lack of attention to what she said, a restrained but yet perceptible weariness whenever she was alone with him. He was liberal even to extravagance in all he gave her ; he was scrupulously punctilious in politeness to her before his household or his friends, and he was seldom ruffled to the utterance even of an impatient sentence to her ear. But, all the same, she felt that she was very little, perhaps nothing, to him ; and when she recalled the adoration of the first few weeks of their union she felt a cold like ice close in about her heart ; for she knew all that she missed, all that she had lost.

No doubt there were many women of her age who would have been made quite sufficiently happy by the material powers and pleasures which he had given her. But she was not. Her pride was incessantly wounded and her affections were incessantly starved ; and she was sore of heart amidst the profusion, the dazzling changes, the movement and the constant crowds, of her new existence.

She had not very much time left to her to think ; but her thoughts were often bitter and

troubled when her lips were speaking those conventional phrases in which she had learned to take refuge. The preoccupation and depression which were so often on her took from the charm of her personal loveliness, because they robbed it of light and animation. The glad spontaneous smile with which she had welcomed the name of Sir Roger de Coverley, or recognised the bay of Christslea in David Cox's drawing, was never seen upon her features now.

‘You have really marvellously acquired all the *morgue* of an English great lady,’ he said to her once. ‘I never imagined you would be able to assume so easily the impassiveness and unpleasantness which my sister and many like her of the old school think so necessary to the high breeding of a woman of fashion!’

He did not perceive that what were dead in her were the vivacity, the *insouciance*, and the abandonment of youth.

‘That is cruelly unkind; I do all that I can to be whatever you wish,’ she answered him with tears brimming in her eyes.

He rose; restless and angry, and unreasonable.

‘For Heaven’s sake, my dear, do not give way to hysteria like that,’ he said with much unconscious exaggeration. ‘I thought you too proud and high-spirited to burst out crying at every word which does not flatter you.’

‘I do not want flattery,’ she said indignantly. ‘I want only justice.’

‘Anything which is not flattery seems injustice to a woman,’ he said irritably. ‘One can never hint a fault to them but what they think we are brutal and ungenerous. All that I ask of you is to enjoy your life—at least, to look as if you did. It is no immense demand, assuredly. You have everything which attracts and pleases other women, and yet nothing whatever seems to attract or please you. I did not make the world, and I cannot alter it. You must learn to take it as it is. We all have to do so, or become intolerable to ourselves and others.’

‘There is only one thing I want,’ she said in a voice so low that he scarcely heard it.

‘What is that?’ he said with some impatience. She looked at him, and could not bring herself to answer.

‘Nothing you can give me,’ she said with

a return of that coldness which he at once admired and detested in her.

‘What some one else can give then?’ he asked with a sudden surprise and displeasure.

‘No.’

‘Cannot you speak, my dear, without enigmas or monosyllables? If it be anything in reason you shall have it.’

She looked at him wistfully. She longed to say to him all that she felt, to open her heart to him in all its longing and pain, but the sensitiveness and pride of her temper kept the words of confession and entreaty from her lips. She was afraid of his contemptuous and slighting reception of her expressions of affection, and she had the overwhelming consciousness that she was too indifferent to him for him ever to take the trouble to penetrate or analyse her feelings for him.

‘I wish I could please you,’ she said, instead of the words which had been on her lips; and these seemed to him stiff and commonplace, and left him cold.

‘You please me in much,’ he said. ‘I am very proud of you in much. But I would willingly see you gayer of temper and more

easily interested. It is so much, my dear, for a woman to be amiable! And nothing is so unamiable as the tendency you display to brood over your own wrongs and *poser* to yourself as superior to the rest of the world. Pray do not let this inclination to tearful scenes grow upon you. Nothing is so distressing to any man; and I more, even than most men, abhor everything approaching to a scene. Remember that, dear, and try to be happy. If I have not made you so it is my misfortune, not my fault.'

He believed what he said.

'It will be terrible,' he thought when he was alone, 'if she become *la femme incomprise*. There is nothing on earth so distressing, so unconsolable, so absolutely unreasonable upon earth. At present she is young, and really lovely, and it does not matter much; but, years hence, it will be unbearable, and how is one to check it? It is always a malady which grows. Good heavens! why were women made like that—always analysing your feelings and their own, always teasing you to tell them that what is dying is not dead; always pulling up love by its roots if they think its blossom looks sickly, always killing by over-culture the very

thing they most wish should live eternally? I know she is good. I think her lovely. I was very fond of her for a while; I am not now; I cannot help that. But it is possible that I might be so again if she did not weary me. Cannot she understand that? No; they never understand it. They can never comprehend that one's soul revolves like the earth, and has its summer and winter solstice. With them it must be all summer at canicular heat, and if they cannot have the sunshine of summer, they will at least have its storms.'

And he went out of his house with a sense of extreme irritation.

'I have always been kind to her,' he would have said, if any one had reproached him; and he was indeed wholly unaware that anything of kindness was lacking in him. He had had a nervous dread of her displaying any attachment to him in the world, and he was relieved to find that she was so undemonstrative and so reasonable. She suffered with all the terrible anxiety of instinctive jealousy whenever she saw his attentions to other women, and when she realised how easy it was for them to enchain and charm him, and how impossible

for her. But her fears took no definite shape ; even her sense of pain came rather from the idea of her own insufficiency to him than of his inconstancy to her.

CHAPTER XXII.

ONE day, Gladys returning unexpectedly from a drive, and going upstairs to her own rooms without summoning any servant, came suddenly on her head waiting woman, who was standing before her opened jewel-safe. It was an iron safe enclosed in an inlaid lac box of great beauty, and standing on a metal tripod, of which the feet were fastened to the floor by screws. The key was kept by herself on her watch-chain.

The woman did not hear her approach, and was pausing in hesitation before the first jewel-tray; her hesitation ended in selecting rapidly two or three rings, which she slipped into the bosom of her dress. She was tempted, but afraid, to take the larger objects. She was a Scotchwoman, a widow, and very religious, high in esteem with, and long trusted by, great families; she had

been in the service of Gladys since her marriage, when she had been hired for her by Lady Sunbury.

Her mistress now went up to her without a sound and took the key out of her hand.

‘Put back those rings you have stolen,’ she said in a calm voice. The woman turned red and white, trembled, stammered, and protested.

‘Denial is of no use,’ said Gladys. ‘You have opened the safe with a false key, for I have its own key on my chain, as you know. Put back the rings. You took three.’

The maid, trembling in every limb, brought them from their hiding-place and restored them to their cases.

‘You will not ruin me, my lady?’ she said piteously. ‘My character is all that I have in the world to live by!’

‘Have you taken anything before?’

‘Not much,’ she muttered. ‘I never touched the safe before, so help me God! But you are very careless with your money, my lady, and it is a cruel temptation to put in the sight of poor folks.’

Gladys looked at her in disgust.

‘And I gave you fifty pounds last month to send your children to the sea!’ she said slowly. ‘And I have trusted you. I have trusted you entirely ever since I took you into my service. Are you not ashamed to have repaid me thus?’

‘You trust everybody, my lady,’ said the woman with ill-concealed scorn. ‘And there are those higher than I, and nearer to you than I, as repays you worse.’

The face of Gladys flushed hotly.

‘Leave me this moment,’ she said; ‘I will not arrest you for the sake of your children. Perhaps I do wrong to let a thief go unmarked into the world. But I hope that you will remember the danger you have escaped, and be honest to your employers in the future.’

The woman made her a low curtsey, murmured a hypocritical blessing on her, and tried to kiss her hand. But Gladys motioned her away.

‘Leave the house in ten minutes, or I will not answer for my longer clemency.’

The maid curtseyed a second time, and withdrew in silence.

‘You young fool!’ she thought, ‘you have never looked if your other jewels are safe, and you little guess the nest-egg I have laid up from your carelessness every month since I have been in your service. Trusted me! Aye, you trust everybody, you born simpleton, and you go through the muck of the world as if it were a meadow of daisies!’

When Gladys told Guilderoy of the incident he was amused.

‘I am glad it is that sanctimonious Presbyterian, whom Hilda thought such a pearl,’ he answered. ‘My dear child, you may be quite sure that you are robbed right and left by all your people. We always are. The woes of employers should be sung by another Tom Hood. The whole world is just now on its knees in adoration before the poorer classes; all the cardinal virtues are taken for granted in them, and it is only property of any kind which is the sinner. But I fancy, if the truth were known, the scales are more evenly weighted than that, and that the continuous robbery to which property is subjected by those possessors of all the virtues who yawn in our halls, and gorge themselves on our food, would pretty

well make the balance even between us. Do not think more about it. Take a Frenchwoman ; you will not find her reading the Bible when you come home from a ball, but she will be much more agreeable to you, and infinitely more honest.'

But to Gladys the matter was not so light.

To a nature which is very faithful, honest, and trustful, any deception seems the most appalling of crimes ; and all ingratitude seems to enter the very flesh like a thorn.

Soon after the discovery of the theft a newspaper was sent to her with a broad mark placed against one of its paragraphs. She supposed it referred to some critique or essay of her father's ; his scholarly work for the great reviews was always full of interest to her even when she did not understand the subject of it. But at the first line she now read a burning colour mounted over her face and throat ; she saw that the paragraph was far from the harmless thing she thought, and that the news-sheet was one of those curses of modern society which live on supplying it with anonymous calumnies.

The marked lines, carefully worded to escape the laws of libel, but plain as the alphabet to the initiated, spoke jestingly of the tender relations existing between one of the largest landowners and most influential peers of the south-western counties and an olive branch brought from the antipodes ; suggested with a sneer that the olive in this case would not mean peace, and recommended the noble Lothario to read the marriage service over once a week. In its studied innuendo and its cowardly malignity the insinuated charge was a masterpiece of its own venomous and iniquitous order. More subtle than Iago, more treacherous than Iscariot, more devilish than Satan's self, these privileged and unpunished carrion-eaters of the press bear ruin and shame and indignity into innocent hearts and happy homes, themselves safe and secure in their masked crime because the very loftiness of the place of those whom they attack forbids them to descend into the mud of public tribunals.

She read it with horror, and flung it from her as she would have cast off a viper.

She had been too much surrounded by

the hints and jests and smiles of the world not to comprehend to what and to whom the slander pointed. But it was the first time that the full meaning of her husband's attentions to women grew plain to her.

She paced to and fro her room in a paroxysm of disgust and horror. She had the sensation of falling headlong down from some giddy height. All the force, the passion, and the scorn which slept under her outward seriousness and serenity leaped up in her. She seized the paper from the corner whither she had flung it, and tore it with quivering hands into a thousand pieces.

At that moment Aubrey entered. One glance at her face told him that she was suffering from some great shock.

'My dear child, what can possibly have happened?' he asked her in great concern.

It was four o'clock; he was going down to the House, and had come in for a moment on his way to bring her some political news

She told him in a few broken and ashamed words what she had read.

'It is not true? It cannot be true?' she

asked him, gazing with heart-breaking entreaty into his face.

‘Of course it is not true, my dear,’ he answered, avoiding her gaze; and he said in his soul, ‘God forgive me if I tell her what is a falsehood!—after all it may not be true.’

‘You should not read those papers,’ he added. ‘The men who fatten and grow rich on them should be flogged at the cart’s tail from Kensington to Shoreditch. When I think that they drink burgundy, and drive in broughams, while we send other men who snatch a watch or a purse to the treadmill, I feel that our whole hollow system of society and civilisation is so accursed that it will be all too good a fate for us if our whole city perishes by the Clan-na-gael.’

‘But is it true?’ she repeated, in all a woman’s seclusive narrowing of thought of her own sufferings and passions. ‘You know—you know—he *does* admire her.’

‘I do not believe he admires her. He plays with her. She amuses idle moments for him in society, that is all,’ replied Aubrey with some embarrassment. ‘My dearest child, do

not distress yourself. An Olive Shiffon is not worth one tear of yours.'

'But I have seen——' The words were broken in their utterance by a sob in her throat.

Aubrey sighed heavily ; he felt all the restless pain of a man before the sorrow of a woman to whom he is sincerely attached, and whom it is utterly out of his power to console.

'You have seen him flirting with her. All that means nothing. You must not put any false construction on it. She is a pretty woman and an audacious ; but she has neither the good breeding nor the good taste which could ever make her really charming to a man who has both. How can you read these foolish and villainous news-sheets?'

'This one was sent to me marked. I thought it was something about some essay of my father's.'

'Very likely she sent it herself,' said Aubrey. But there he wronged her ; it was the discharged maid who had sent it. 'She is an adventuress, nothing better, though London society has taken her to its bosom. My dear

Gladys, do not descend to any thought of her. It is beneath you.'

'That is easily said !' she murmured, with a faint smile.

'And difficult to feel. That I quite understand. But not impossible, I think, is it? Not to a proud and loyal nature? Not to your father's daughter?'

She was silent. He was infinitely grieved for her. He felt an intensity of indignation on her behalf which he could not express lest he should lend weight to her suspicions and strength to her anger. His affection for her was full of compassion, and he felt much what he would have felt if he had seen a child that he was fond of struck a blow on its tender flesh.

He endeavoured to make her apprehensions and her wrongs seem lighter than he knew that they had every right to be, because he was convinced that any evidence of her indignation given to his cousin would only cause dissension and disunion, and lead to a scene which would very likely end in final rupture.

'You have never been intimate with this person?' he asked.

‘Never. I bow to her ; and he told me to send her a card for our great ball ; that was all.’

‘Then you will have no trial of intercourse with her. I am sure that he will not ask you to invite her to Ladysrood. He knows what my sister’s and his sister’s opinions of her are. Next season you may be sure he will have forgotten she exists. You will say nothing of this to him?’

‘No?’

Her accent was interrogative, doubtful, reproachful.

‘No,’ said Aubrey. ‘No ; certainly not if you are wise, my dear. He is not a man to be patient under interrogation or reproach. If you appeared to believe such a story you would possibly excite, you would inevitably irritate him. He will see and know nothing of it. He never reads newspapers by any hazard, and you may be sure that no one will venture to speak of this to him.’

‘But something should be done? Is such an offence as that to pass? Am I to be humiliated in such a way, and no one of all my friends revenge it?’

‘Leave the matter to me,’ said Aubrey. ‘You are a part of my family. All that ought to be done shall be done. But for your own sake, my dear, do not open this subject with Guilderoy.’

She was silent still.

All the burning pain of the first deadly knowledge of her life was like fire in her veins. To her, as to every woman who loves and is wronged, the hardest task of all was to be meek and to endure with patience.

‘You believe that I am your friend?’ said Aubrey, gravely, as he took her hands in his own. She raised her eyes to his heavy with tears.

‘Oh, yes,’ she said, with deep emotion. ‘You are the only friend I have, except my father.’

Aubrey was deeply touched, but he restrained all that he felt.

‘Do not say that, dear; you have many who care for you. My sister cares very warmly; and were she here she would say the same to you as I. Do not be the first to break your peace with Evelyn; if you were to speak of this bitterly—and you could not speak of it calmly—it would be a firebrand which would set in a

blaze the whole of your relations with him, present and future.'

She did not answer. She could not say even to Aubrey what she felt in her heart, that she was absolutely nothing to her husband, and that the violence of anger from him would have seemed almost more easily endurable than the sense that he only gave her outward courtesies and that sort of indifferent regard which he felt for her because she was physically beautiful, and so did him honour in the world.

'You will promise me?' said Aubrey. 'I have not a moment to lose. I must be at the House in ten minutes' time; tell me before I go that you will follow my counsels. Believe me they are such as Vernon himself would give you were he here.'

'I will try,' she answered.

'That is not enough. You must say, "I will." You will keep your promise once given, I know.'

She hesitated a moment; then she said in a low voice:

'You can judge best, I daresay. I will not speak of it.'

'That is right, and brave, and wise. One

day you will thank me,' said Aubrey; he kissed her forehead gravely with his accustomed salute and left her.

It had cost him much to keep to her a tone so calm and in semblance almost unsympathetic. He felt that if he had met Guilderoy upon the staircase of the house it would have been a hard struggle not to have insulted him in her behalf. But he knew that the advice which he had given her was sound. She would have to learn to bear such trials as these in silence. Probably much heavier ones would await her in the future.

'Poor child!' he thought sadly. His heart was heavy as he walked towards Westminster. His thoughts went back to the days of his early and secret marriage; the fatal mistake of his boyhood, which had been confessed to his father but to no other creature in the world. He recalled the immense devotion, the exaggerated constancy, which he had given in the ardour and loyalty of youth to one whose worthlessness he had learned too late. How strange, how contradictory, how cruel, he thought, the caprices and the awards of fate! He who in the loneliness of rank and power would have deemed a

great, a disinterested, and a faithful love the dearest of earth's treasures, had been betrayed where he had given heart and soul and honour ; and his cousin, to whom to give constancy was impossible and to receive it was wearisome, had the whole life of this beautiful child centered in him, and was moved by it rather to impatience and annoyance than to any other emotion !

‘ He will want some day what he throws away now,’ thought Aubrey as he walked to his place in the Chamber.

And the next moment he knew that this reflection was romantically false ; that it was beyond all other things unlikely that Guilderoy would ever be met by any such chastisement in kind ; and that in the treasure-house of love it is frequently those who give the least who most receive.

CHAPTER XXIII.

‘I HAVE not a doubt the Shiffton woman had it put in herself to compromise him. It is just the sort of thing she would do,’ said the Duchess of Longleat, when he spoke of the matter to her.

‘He has no right to place himself in a position to be compromised,’ said Aubrey.

‘The best advice to her,’ said the Duchess, ‘would be to flirt outrageously; to compromise herself, to awaken him and affright him. But one hesitates to tell her that, it is always playing with edged tools.’

‘And I do not think she would do it if you did tell her. The swan cannot affect the parade of the peacock. She is not of that type.’

‘No, she will not flirt,’ said the Duchess. ‘But she may do worse. If she be thus chilled and offended, she may throw herself into some

flood of real passion, half out of vengeance, and half out of the need of love. That is usually the way with women who are reserved in manner but have warm hearts.'

'There is no such passion in our day.'

'Oh, my dear, that is a mere phrase. There is as much, or as little, as there ever was probably. Your favourite Greeks and Latins were as fond of butterfly loves as our society is, if I remember aright the verses that you used to translate to me at Balfrons when we were children.'

'Yes, but theirs *were* loves, whilst they lasted; in most of the "affairs" of our days what is there except vanity, advertisement, often avarice, sometimes jealousy, at best, sensual impulses? Of passion nothing, or almost nothing.'

'I think she would be capable of more.'

'I think so too; she is capable of more; but it is thrown away on a man who does not even perceive it.'

'She will not always give everything for nothing.'

'Probably; and that makes her danger. If she ever love anyone else, she will not

be content with one of the passing *liaisons* of which we see so much ; she will believe herself lost, as women believed in old days, and will end her life wretchedly in ceaseless remorse.'

'It is Guilderoy who should have the remorse.'

Aubrey smiled bitterly.

'My dear ! Do you think he could ever be stirred to such an emotion, even if he stood by her dead body ? He would say that she had always been unreasonable, and unsympathetic. Every woman seems to him unsympathetic, and unreasonable, who does not at once understand his desertion of her.'

He felt the greatest anger against his cousin ; he had always been impatient of his many changes and his countless passions, and he had blamed him for wasting all his years and his intelligence in the mere pursuit of women who only wearied him as soon as they were won. But now his anger against him took a more personal shape. He felt intolerant of his neglect of his duties and his indifference to all that was noblest and worthiest of culture in the nature of Gladys.

He preserved silence towards him, because

his intimate experience of the world told him that interference has almost always unhappy issues, and he saw no way in which it would be possible for him to convey to Guilderoy his own opinions without producing such a quarrel as must inevitably put an end to all intimacy between them. Besides, what effect could remonstrance of any kind have upon a temperament like his cousin's?

If he did not care for his wife, what condemnation or persuasion could ever induce him to do so? Feelings are not to be called into existence by censure or argument. They are wind-sown flowers, and must spring how and where they will.

Gladys kept her word.

She never mentioned the matter to Guilderoy, and she never flinched or even betrayed anger when she met Olive Shiffton in society, as she constantly did. Her manner grew a little colder, a little graver, to all the world than it had been before; and all the women, and many a man, said what a pity it was that she was so silent, and looked so uninterested, that none could, in common parlance, 'get on' with her; but that was all. She went out

into the world with her pain hidden under conventional courtesies, with quite as much courage as the Spartan boy who hid the growling cub beneath his cloak.

Was it true? That wonder, that doubt, haunted her every hour. It occupied her every thought. It almost made her forget her little dead boys lying in their tiny coffins on beds of dead white roses in the churchyard of Ladysrood. Was it true? Was it?

At times, horrible coarse temptations assailed her, things that she had read of or heard of, means by which women in jealous pain learned the truth through interrogated servants or bribed messengers. But such temptations only passed through her mind for moments, as hot winds sweep over fair fields. Her loyalty and her pride alike rejected their tempting. Yet the impression grew more strongly upon her that it was true. There was, or she fancied there was, an insolence of triumph in the black languid eyes of Olive Shiffton whenever they met hers across a crowded room, which to her tortured fancy confirmation writ. And she had not even the solace of Aubrey's presence, for ten days after the day on which

she had received the journal he had been compelled to go to Balmoral as the minister in attendance on the Queen.

What was the use of a great love, she thought wearily, if he to whom it was given neither heeded nor wanted it?

It was certainly beautiful in theory for her father to bid her make hers so great, that her husband could find no other equal to it; but if its force, its sincerity, its magnitude, only formed a total which was wearisome to the object of it, what then? What good could it effect? To what purpose did it exist? She could comprehend that women might pardon inconstancy, where it was loyally confessed and generously atoned for; she could imagine that there might be relations which only became closer, sweeter, and dearer for temporary separation and offences of the passions; but neither of these was her case. Guilderoy neither confessed nor atoned, neither quarrelled with, nor admitted that he offended her. He simply went his own way as though he had never married her, and was at once so calm, so courteous, and so careless that such serenity hurt and insulted her more in her own sight

than any quarrel with her would have done. Aubrey and her father both spoke of her duties as making patience, silence, and endurance her obligation ; but she was too young and too much in love with her husband to resign herself to that mute course without the most painful effort. No doubt they were right, no doubt they were wise, she thought bitterly, but they were not women with aching hearts that they could understand. Did any one understand ? No one in the world, she thought. Every one seemed to consider that such trials as hers were inevitable and mattered little. Every one seemed to hold that the material advantages of position and fortune were compensation enough for all pain.

She loved him with all the tender and fanciful poetry of youth and womanhood ; but any expression of it had been crushed into silence in her, by the consciousness which came to her very early that it would seem to him inopportune and wearisome. He was not a man to prolong passion after possession, and any evidence of his wife's for him would have been sure to find him cold and critical. He had hinted as much to her once, and her

mind, sensitive and receptive to a fault, never forgot the impression given to her by it. He had without intending it conveyed to her the sense that she was his, much as were the other decorations of his state and his position ; the companion of his days of ceremony, not of his hours of pleasure, the associate of his rank, but not of his affections.

He had not intended to give her this impression in any measure so strongly as she had received it ; but it had been given even in the early Venetian days, and could not be effaced. When the speaker is careless of what he says, and the hearer listens with apprehension and self-torment, the latter constantly is wounded when the former had no intent whatever to wound.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SOME weeks later in the season she chanced to stop her carriage one afternoon at a fashionable club; old Lord Balfrons, who scarcely ever stirred out of his own houses, had been in person to her desiring to see Guilderoy at once. She did not know at all where he was, and said so, but his uncle was sure that he was at one of his clubs at that hour, and bade her go and inquire. The old marquis was angered and anxious; he had set his fancy on securing a certain Vandyke which had come into the market, and in his son's absence required the offices of his nephew. He was petulant, eager, and unreasonable; as great age, like youth, is apt to be when there is a chance that one of its whims may be thwarted; and Gladys, afraid to vex him, did what she had never done before, and drove to various houses in Pall Mall and St. James' Street.

At one of them the porter, new to his place and ill-versed in the prudence which his situation required, came to her carriage-door with a note in his hand. He said that Guilderoy had not as yet been to the club that day; but there was a letter which had come for him; would her ladyship take it? Gladys took the envelope in her hand, and she recognised the grey olive leaf and the gold letter S. For an instant a horrible temptation assailed her; she held the note one brief instant in her hand while the colour changed in her cheeks from pale to red, from red to pale, in rapid alternation. In another instant she had conquered the temptation; she remembered the scorn which her father would have for her if she yielded to it.

She gave the letter back to the porter. 'Lord Guilderoy will take it when he comes,' she said, in a voice which trembled a little despite her efforts. 'To the park,' she said to her servant; and the horses bore her rapidly away.

The day chanced to be fine; the sunshine was gay. Her friends and acquaintances saluted her by the score; but though she

mechanically returned their salutations she was not sensible of what she did. The noise of the streets was like the sound of a great sea in her ears, and the yellow light, with the motes of the sunbeams and the vapours of the smoke dancing in it, was vague and confused before her eyes.

The sight of the letter had confirmed the suspicion which had haunted her for some days. Jealousy seemed to her a miserable and vulgar thing ; a wretched weakness which any woman of courage and pride should scout as a degradation ; and yet, being only human, she was jealous, and she suffered intensely.

‘ Does pain always make vileness so easy ? ’ she thought bitterly. That she should have felt such a temptation seemed for one moment to have sunken her fathoms deep in indignity. John Vernon had taught her the code of honour of a high-bred gentleman, the kind of teaching which is unhappily omitted from the education of most women, yet which is more necessary for their own happiness, and that of those connected with them, than all the learning or graces in the world. Had he wholly ceased

to care for her? Had he, indeed, ever really cared at all? The doubt which had so long festered and ached in her heart became a certainty. She did not believe that he had ever loved her. In truth he never had.

She did not see him that day or evening at all; they had different engagements. The next day they had a dinner party at home; she saw him for a moment before it, and took the occasion to say to him: 'Would you mind my going to Ladysrood for a few days? I am tired of the hurry of the season.'

'My love, always do what you wish,' answered Guilderoy, with the careless amiability of indifference. 'I would not remain long were I you; it would look odd at this moment.'

'He does not even wish me away,' she thought. 'So little does my presence affect him!'

Aloud she answered, 'I will only stay three days; only time enough to see my father.'

'Your father should come into the world. It is a pity he is so eccentric. He would be the most popular man in London if he would only show himself.'

‘He would not care for popularity.’

‘I wish you did ; at the least it is a very amiable quality, and wins one innumerable friends.’

‘You are very popular.’

There was an accent which sounded disagreeably in the ear of Guilderoy in the few simple words.

‘I do not think I am,’ he said with irritation. ‘I care too little about other people. I am too great an egotist, as you and your father are always telling me, and I believe it is true.’

‘You are very popular,’ she repeated quietly. ‘At least with women.’

‘You do me much honour,’ he replied with a little laugh, not entirely free from embarrassment. At that moment the first of their guests entered their drawing-rooms. The next morning, very early, before Guilderoy was awake, she left the house, and took the express train of the forenoon to Ladysrood without announcing her arrival there to any one. In the coolness of the late summer afternoon she drove her ponies over the moor to her father’s cottage. The sandy road, running between high banks

of marl and sandstone, crowned with blossoming furze, with nodding foxgloves, and with osmunda fern, was the same which John Vernon had taken after the ceremony of her marriage, when he had wished the golden flowers to be a symbol of her path through life.

The evening was grey and still, and very peaceful; there was a honey smell in the air rising from the short wild thyme; it had rained the day before, and there was a delicious moisture in the air; the moors were lonely, here and there girls drove a flock of geese across them, or a herd of red and dappled cattle was seen browsing quietly. The simple familiar scene touched her painfully; it seemed centuries since she had been a child there herself, as careless as the girl that drove the geese, as the young heifers that cropped the thyme: and yet not much more than three years had gone by since she had been found in the hut with the fox cub, and had left childhood behind forever, not knowing her loss.

She found John Vernon reading a mighty folio of ancient date under the apple trees of his pasture, and for a moment she felt a child again, when she saw the ivy-shrouded porch,

the homely sweet-smelling garden, the low thatched roof, and the lattice window of her own chamber. She never came to Christslea without a sense of peace returning to her for so long as she stayed under its tangle of honeysuckle and of sweetbriar.

‘Why did you not tell me, my dear? I would have awaited you at Ladysrood,’ said Vernon. ‘What can possibly bring you down in the height of the season? Are you not well? You look tired.’

‘The life is fatiguing, there is nothing real in it; it is all haste and turmoil.’

‘Nevertheless you should enjoy even that at your age. I think they call it being *dans le mouvement*, do they not? I suppose the *mouvement* is much wilder and more breathless than it was in my day. However, my dear child, whatever the sins of the world, I am grateful to them since they have sent you to lighten my loneliness.’

‘You will come back to Ladysrood with me, will you not? I shall only be there one day, I must go back on the third; there is a State ball; they would not like me to be absent from it.’

‘I will come with you willingly,’ said John Vernon. ‘You know without you at Christslea, the summer brings no flowers for me.’

‘I love to be here!’ said his daughter. ‘It makes me feel young again.’

When she had renewed her acquaintance with the old man and woman who formed the household of Christslea, with the cocks and the hens, with the birds and the bees, with the red and white stocks and the clumps of sweet-william, with the big old dog, and the tame fox in the orchard, and to please the old servants had drunk a little cyder and eaten a piece of honeycomb, sitting in the porch, she drove her father home with her in the now darkening night to Ladysrood.

‘Really, my love, you should be a very happy woman,’ said Vernon, as the ponies trotted through the deep ferny brakes of the park over the smooth grass drives, and going at a gallop up the lime avenue of the western entrance, were pulled up before the great house standing glorious and spiritualised in the white moonlight, with all its towers and pinnacles and fantastic corbels standing out against the starlit sky.

‘Because the park is fine and the house is handsome?’ said Gladys, in a tone which he had never heard from her. ‘Surely these are very coarse and material reasons for *you* to allege? I thought you never weighed externals.’

‘I do not think they are coarse reasons,’ said Vernon, a little coldly. ‘Beauty is a great element in happiness. Not the only factor, certainly, but a very important factor nevertheless, for those who have eyes to see it. I think the possession of an ancient, historical, and beautiful house is one of the most poetic pleasures in life; and I think, too, that the indifference with which many of the owners of such houses consider them is one of the greatest signs of decay in any nobility. Not long ago, too, my dear, you were in love with Ladysrood. I hope you do not tire of it because it is yours. That would be a sad lesson for London life to have taught you.’

‘I like it very much,’ said Gladys; but the tone had no warmth in it. ‘I daresay if my little boys had lived I should have felt affection for it.’

‘You will have other children, no doubt,’ said Vernon, ‘and I should have thought there were already existing reasons for you to be attached to your home.’

She did not reply.

‘I confess I am very attached to it myself,’ he continued, not wishing to dwell too seriously on the subject. ‘It is a really noble place, and though it is very eclectic in the many various tastes which have gone to make it what it is, yet it is harmonious even in its contradictions of styles and epochs. The only perfect house is a house in which one reads as in a book the history of a race.’

It was nine o’clock. Dinner awaited them, served in the small dining-room of the Queen Anne wing of the house. Vernon ate nothing, as was his custom at that hour, and his daughter ate little; her favourite dogs supplied willing appetites. The dinner over, she and he strolled out on to the west terrace; the air was very warm, the stars brilliant, the sound of the distant sea came to their ears on the silence; behind them were the lighted windows of the wings; before them the quaint green garden, with its high clipped hedges, its fishponds, its yew

trees under which Charles Stuart had played at bowls, and Elizabeth Tudor had sat to watch a midsummer masque sparkling amongst the roses. They stood awhile leaning against the balustrade of the terrace, then Vernon sat down on one of the stone chairs, and said quietly :

‘ Tell me, my love, why have you come to me ? ’

Gladys did not change her position. She still leaned her arms on the balustrade, her chin rested on her hands ; her eyes looked into the dewy darkness of the hushed night.

‘ I wanted to tell you what a vile and mean thing I nearly did,’ she answered slowly ; and she told him of her temptation to open the letter.

Vernon sat mute, his face in shadow, and he spoke no word till she had finished quite ; even then he waited some moments ere he answered.

‘ You could not help your longing,’ he said at length. ‘ It is just these inclinations towards base actions which sometimes enter the highest souls which make us understand how the myth of the devil arose. I am thankful,

indeed, that my daughter did not stoop to baseness.'

She turned her face towards him, and her eyes were full of tears.

'He does not love me, you know. I have known it a long time. I do not think he ever did.'

'My dear! You are dreaming! Why else should he have married you?'

'It was a caprice—he has so many caprices. Do you remember that line in the Phædrus: "What we call winged Eros, the immortals call Pteros for his flighty nature?" Pteros is his love. He knows no other.'

John Vernon listened with bitter regret. He had known that it was so; he had always known it; but he had hoped that she would be young enough and blind enough not to find it out herself—at all events, not to find it out until time should have rendered it a matter of little moment to her. All his heart yearned towards her in this her first great sorrow, but he believed that sympathy would be the unkindest kindness which he could give her. What was the use of feeding morbid regrets and sense of wrong which could never avail in

any way to get her back what she believed that she had lost?

‘I think you speak very bitterly and hastily on small grounds,’ he said, resisting his desire to sympathise with her, and curse the man who had made her unhappy. ‘It does not in the least follow that because a woman writes to him secretly that he invites, or even cares for, her to do so. It may be even an annoyance to him that he cannot prevent. You cannot tell.’

‘I can tell. I have seen them together a hundred times. I believe the whole world knows it—except myself.’

‘Well, let us admit that it is so. I do not defend him. But I do say, my dear, that jealousy in a man’s wife makes her odious to him and ridiculous to the world at large. In a woman who is not his wife jealousy may be permissible, because her tenure is so insecure that she may naturally tremble for its duration. But in his wife it is to others absurd and to him intolerable. *Une femme qui se respecte n’est jamais jalouse.* My dear child, you are still very young; you still know no more than very young women do of the characters and

passions of men. My dear, I can assure you of one thing—no man is constant to one woman. Male constancy is not in nature, and therefore it is not demanded in law. I understand that you are in love with your husband, and therefore it is impossible for you to understand why he is no longer in love with you. I can only tell you, my child, that nature has made man inconstant; utterly inconstant through his senses, even when he remains constant in his heart. It is terrible to you; it is terrible to every woman when she learns it for the first time. But the only women who ever arrive at retaining happiness are those who recognise this as a fact, and allow for the man's infidelity as they would pardon an infant's forwardness.'

She was silent; her chin still rested on her hands, her eyes still gazed into the shadowy woods which surrounded the gardens beneath her. Her whole soul rebelled passionately at the suggestion that she should accept inconstancy as inevitable and forgive it as immaterial; she had all the vehemence, the narrowness, the exclusive passion of youth and of womanhood.

‘Why did you not tell me all this—before you let me marry?’ she said at last, very bitterly.

Vernon had long known that some day or other that reproach would be brought against him.

‘It would have been no use, my love,’ he said gently; ‘no use whatever if I had. Love had blinded you. And I could not even speak of such things to a child like you. What could you have understood? You do not even understand much now.’

‘I understand, then, you think him right?’

‘I have never said so. I do not necessarily approve a thing because I admit its possibility. Abstractedly, I agree with Plato that men should govern their passions, but actually I know that they do not do so until they are at least as old as I am, and not always then. And what I most want you to see is, that even if your husband be indeed unfaithful to you, which is a mere assumption on your part, you will gain nothing by the endeavour to resent what you cannot alter. After all, my child, if a woman cannot keep the affections she has

once won, pride should keep her from lamenting her own failure, and tenderness should make her silent on it. You seem to me to be drifting into a state of irritation and of *aigreur*, which can serve no purpose except that of your enemies, if you have any, who may wish to see the breach widened between you and Guilderoy.'

'The women who care for him wish it no doubt!'

'Well, it is into their hands that you play. You have self-control and you have intelligence. I want you to perceive that, whatever she may feel, only a weak woman and a silly woman degrades herself by the exhibition of conjugal jealousy.'

She was again silent; she bit her lips to restrain the emotion which well nigh mastered her. She knew that her father was right, but the advice struck on the aching warmth of her young heart like cold steel on warm flesh.

John Vernon's own heart ached for her, and had he followed his impulse he would have given her the mere fond unreasoning consoling sympathy that another woman would have

given. But he knew that it would be the most unwholesome thing that he could offer her in such a moment.

‘You have said nothing, I hope, to Guilderoy?’ he asked her. She shook her head. ‘Pray continue to say nothing. If it be not as you suppose, a false accusation would incense him greatly; if it be as you suppose, it could do no possible good. You would drive him into either a subterfuge or a rage. Neither are desirable results. Believe me, dear, a wise woman never asks questions. What is the use of asking them? The person tormented takes refuge in prevarication or in downright falsehood. His character is irritated and injured, and the woman who has worried him sinks farther and farther from any chance of ever obtaining his true and voluntary confidence. Love may be won and confidence may be won, but neither can be bullied.’

‘What am I to do then? To learn to care nothing? Is that the best?’ she asked in a cold voice.

‘God forbid,’ said Vernon. ‘What did I tell you, my child, the day you first came home after your marriage? That you must care so

much that you will give him an affection he cannot get elsewhere. I admit that this requires self-negation, self-control, self-effacement, in a measure which it is exceedingly hard to attain. Most women are self-centred even when they are not selfish. Their egotism is wholly unlike male egotism, but it is apt to be very narrow and very exacting. A man changes and forgets; the woman often does neither; but it does not follow that for that reason she is unselfish, though no doubt she thinks she is, in her close adherence to her memories. My dear child, life is not all a poem nor all a playtime. It is often monotonous, trying, and full of irritation. This period of yours is especially so to you. But you will not make it smoother or happier by thinking yourself wronged on small proof.'

'But if it be true that I am? 'Then——'

'Then—well, even then I would counsel you to bear it with silence and with dignity. Expostulation and upbraiding are bad weapons, and cut the hand which uses them. I never thought that Lord Guilderoy was of a character which would give you happiness. I did not tell you so, but I told him so con-

stantly. He has the natural faults of a man whom the whole world has conspired to spoil. He is imaginative, impatient, capricious, and inflammable; such men are always inconstant; they cannot help being so any more than the vane can help turning with the wind. But he has many lovable and generous qualities; to you he has been exceptionally generous; think of his finer nature and pardon him its weaker side. That is the only counsel I dare give you, for your sake and for his. Alas! I see you are unconvinced.'

'I am unhappy!' she said in her heart, but she did not say it aloud. She was angered against her father; she had expected from him indignant denunciation and a sympathy which would not pause to weigh or analyse. Her heart was aching bitterly with passionate pain which would have willingly found vent in some rash action; the calm philosophy of John Vernon seemed to her like so much ice given her when she shivered in the cold and asked for a shelter by the fire.

'It is no use speaking of it,' she said, wearily; after a while, 'Let us go in; I think the turmoil of London hurts me less than all

this summer silence. One wants to be so happy to bear to look at the stars !’

Vernon rose and put his arm tenderly upon her shoulder.

‘My dear child ! you will be happy again. You have not bidden adieu to life at twenty years old ! My advice sounds very chill and unsympathetic to you no doubt ; but it is sound. It is of no use to rebel against woes which spring from character. You are very young still ; you are a beautiful woman ; if you have tact and patience and forbearance you will ultimately vanquish your rivals, if rivals you truly have. But if you display jealousy, if you descend to baseness, to espionage, to recrimination, you will forfeit your own esteem and you will lose all hold upon your husband. Men, my love, are not merciful to women’s tears as a rule ; and when it is a woman belonging to them who weeps, they only go out and slam the door behind them !’

‘I shall not weep, believe me,’ she said, bitterly ; and she drew herself away from his touch and went across the pavement of the terrace into the drawing-room which opened on to it ; the wax lights were shining on the red

satin wall-hangings, the rococo furniture, the Chelsea and Worcester china, the old Delft and Nankin vases ; it was the room in which Guilderoy had told his sister of his intention to marry John Vernon's daughter.

Her father followed her, and looked at her in silence, with infinite pity.

‘It was not my fault,’ he thought. ‘I did what I could. It was the old story, *si jeunesse savait !* Ah ! *si jeunesse savait*, what marriage would ever be made at all ?’

He took her hands in his.

‘My dearest Gladys,’ he said, gravely, ‘I confess that I do not think your life will be very happy. I never thought that it would be. You have a great position and great possessions, but you are not of a nature to be satisfied with these. But it lies with you to retain what one may say are the angels which stand about the throne of life—honour, unselfishness, and sympathy ; they are not the smiling angels which youth loves best, but they have a comfort in them by a dying bed. Try that they shall always be with you. The rest of the heavenly troop will very likely come behind them uncalled.’

The tears, so long withheld, rushed into her eyes; she kissed the hands which held hers, and left the room. He let her go, and himself paced to and fro the long red room with agitated steps; it had cost him effort to keep so calm a tone, to give only so apparently niggard a sympathy.

‘While I am here I can save her perhaps,’ he thought. ‘But when I am gone?——’

And he knew that this might be soon, for what he had never told her was the frail tenure on which his own life hung, and the ever-near end of all things which was only warded off by that perfectly passionless and solitary life which he was supposed by her, and by all who knew him, to have selected by free choice.

‘When I am gone——’ he thought, and the thought was one of acute and intense pain to him. The idea that he would tell her husband his own secret, and beseech his better care of her, passed through his mind; but what use, he reflected, would it be? Guilderoy was gentle, courteous, and kind; easily moved, too, for awhile, and ready to promise impossibilities; he would be sorry, he would be touched, he would swear to be governed by

loyalty and constancy ; and then, women and the world would surround him, and he would forget. It would be only waste of words. John Vernon never wasted words, and for a score of years had never asked for sympathy ; and he had so long kept in his own breast the knowledge of the mortal disease within him that he could not have brought himself to speak of it without painful effort.

CHAPTER XXV.

‘DID you ever hear of the story of Griseldis?’^a he asked her the next day as they strolled through the gardens.

‘Yes; she was a very foolish woman.’

‘Certainly she looks somewhat of a fool to us. But perhaps she was in truth very wise; she gained what she wanted in the end.’

‘She had certainly a very pitiful spirit.’

‘Do you think so? Patience and silence are never pitiful, surely. They are grand qualities.’

Gladys smiled with some scorn.

‘A donkey is patient, so is a cow. We do not rate them very highly in the scale of creation.’

‘Do you often answer Evelyn in that tone?’

‘I do not know. Yes, perhaps—I daresay I do. Why?’

‘Only that it would possibly tend to make him seek the society of those who did not.’

She was silent.

‘We often complain,’ continued Vernon, with some dreaminess in his tone, ‘that others do not care for us, or cease to care for us; and we seldom ask ourselves if the fault is not ours, if we are not often irritating and even intolerable to them; if we try to understand them in what is opposed to us; if we endeavour to give them what *they* wish, not what *we* wish. Love, which is made such a fuss about, is only an immense selfishness unless it does do this. What do you think? You despise Griseldis; what would you have had her do?’

‘Go away.’

‘Go away? And leave her children?’

‘She could have taken them with her.’

‘A dangerous vengeance. And she would have violated her marriage vows.’

‘Since he violated his, she would surely have been justified.’

‘Ah, my dear! the cases are not parallel.

Both psychology and physiology will tell you so if you study them. Griseldis no doubt never studied either, but she was wise enough to act as if she had.'

'When I was a child and read the story, I despised her.'

'Then there is something of true womanhood lacking in you, my dear.'

'Is true womanhood abject slavishness?'

'It is infinite abnegation of self.'

Gladys laughed, and there was a sound of hardness in the laugh.

'Then women of the world have very little of it indeed. They dress, they flirt if they can, they spend money when they have it, and run bills when they have not; they make a fuss over a quantity of useless undertakings which they call charity, or politics, as their taste is, but they never sacrifice themselves for one second of their time; when they take their lovers it is with a view of self-aggrandisement by some affair which will make them more sought after by the world and by other men. There is not an emotion, scarcely even a sensual preference, in any one of their attachments. I wish that you would come into the world. You would

see then there would be no place in it for Griseldis if she were revived.'

'Griseldis is a figure of speech.'

'Yes. Nowadays she would have the income of her settlements, the custody of her children, and the consolation of the newspapers!'

'You are rather cynical, my dear. It is not becoming to a young woman, and it is not lovable in an old one.'

'Ah, I wish I had never left you and Christslea.'

'Do you think you would have been contented if you had married a curate or a squire? I doubt it. There is something naturally *grande dame* in you which would have rebelled against small means and narrow lives.'

'I never rebelled when I was with you.'

'No. You were a good child, but you were a child. I did not welcome your marriage, but I doubt if I should have been stoic enough to complacently watch your roses fade, and your years slip away, in the rustic loneliness and homeliness of my cottage. It was lovely to see you in it at seventeen, but it would not have been lovely to see you in it at seven-and-twenty.'

What the French call *un beau mariage* is after all a magic wand to a maiden.'

She did not speak, but she gave an impatient gesture.

Vernon looked at her earnestly. 'Do you absolutely regret yours?' he asked. 'Would you undo it if you could?'

'This moment!'

There was the vibration of intense meaning in the words.

Vernon sighed.

'That is terrible if it be true. I hope you speak in haste and in offence. You are more unforgiving, Gladys, and less generous than I thought you. I thought that your feelings for Guilderoy were of a very different kind.'

'You have a curious tenderness for him!' she said, bitterly.

'I do not think I have any,' replied her father. 'But I confess that, as a man of honour, I feel that both you and I are bound to give him some indulgence in return for the confidence he placed in us, and for the great gifts (though you think them mere vulgar considerations) which he has lavished on you in an affection

which, if not eternal, must have been genuine. I am the last person on earth to over-estimate such gifts ; but I am also, I confess, the last person on earth who could tolerate the idea that my daughter, when a man trusted her with his name, and his good name, hated the one and imperilled the other. My dear, it was said by a Greek called Socrates, long before it was repeated by Christ, that it is not right to do evil, and that to say it has been done to us is no excuse or reason for us to return it. Nor can I easily conceive that one could feel any temptation to return it if it were done by a person we had ever once loved ! ’

He spoke very calmly, but there was an accent of sternness in his voice which she had never heard from him. She felt for the first time in her life that she had in all the world no judge so just but none so unrelentingly severe as her father.

The question which sorely perplexed John Vernon was not to change or control the caprices of Guilderoy, for he considered that hopeless, but how to induce his wife to comprehend them in a measure, and to view them, if not with pardon, at least with serenity and silence.

What else was there for her to do?

His natural affection for his child made him angered against the man who caused her mortification and pain, but the sense of justice which was equally strong in him made him conscious that it was impossible for such a man to confine his existence within the limits of such emotions and such actions as would be likely to please the ear and meet the approval of a woman as young as Gladys. There is an instinctive movement towards freedom, an instinctive aversion to self-confession, in the breast of every man who has not outlived his enjoyment of the warmth of passion and the pleasures of liberty.

‘But alas! alas!’ thought John Vernon, ‘so few women are wise enough to know this, and still fewer women are unselfish enough to act on it!’

Her dignity, her demands, her sentiments, her desires, her injuries and her rights, loom so large usually in a woman’s sight that she never sees beyond them, and thus for ever misses truth.

The exceeding justness of his nature made him able to conceive the irritation that it would be to Guilderoy to account for all his

hours to a woman as young, and as incapable of comprehending his errors, as his wife was; and he could admit the innumerable temptations to inconstancy which his fortune, his world, and his disposition combined to make irresistible and continual to him. Now and then a man will conquer the world in the heart of a woman, but never will a woman conquer the world in the heart of a man. Whatever it be—the world of pleasure, of ambition, or of speculation—the passion of it having once entered his soul will reign there for ever till his last hour.

‘It can never be the same thing between a man and a woman,’ thought Vernon. ‘She—if she be a woman young and innocent—she has a clean bill of moral health, has nothing to conceal, and nothing that she would hesitate to confide. But he has and must have fifty thousand things in his past and present that are not subjects for confidence; his life cannot be narrowed to what is to be told to his wife. Other women have claims on his silence and honour: in a word he is a man, and requires a man’s large liberty of action. When moralists pretend that it should be otherwise they sub-

stitute a conventional fiction which has led to hopeless pretensions and heartburnings amongst women. Even a lover does not give for any length of time the same kind of fidelity that the woman gives to him, though a lover's fidelity is more stimulated than that of a husband, more tempted to remain true because uncertain of its tenure. Dumas fils and many other writers are fond of pretending that fidelity should be equal in both sexes, but they only put forward a wholly untrue and impossible thesis, and make women wretched because they incite them to demand what both nature and law will for ever unite to refuse them !'

He was grieved that Gladys was no wiser, no more magnanimous than the rest. Had the education he had given her been in fault? Had sea and moor, and Latin verse and Saxon Chronicle, not tended to make her into stronger stuff than the irrational, egotistical, and wholly unreasonable temper of the majority of her sex? Why must she, like them, take jealousy for devotion, irritation for passion, offence for dignity, mortification for martyrdom?

‘You surely do not mean that Guilderoy would leave you for another woman?’ he asked abruptly.

‘Oh, no,’ she answered bitterly. ‘He would neither love nor hate me enough to do anything of the kind. Why should he do it either? He does not think enough about me for me to be the slightest embarrassment to him.’

Her father sighed as he heard.

Against indifference the gods themselves are powerless.

Had Desdemona waked from her murdered sleep she would have found the tenderest and most penitent of lovers in her jealous lord ; but the amiable apathy of a careless and unobservant indifference has no quality in it of that kind which can be roused and changed into devotion or remorse.

‘I think he even likes me!’ she said with greater bitterness still. ‘I annoy him sometimes because I am not pliable, or facile, or amusable enough ; but on the whole he likes me, and if receiving an innumerable quantity of presents were happiness I should be in heaven. What he does not give in

feeling he atones for in furs and jewels and *bibelots*!’

‘I hope,’ said John Vernon gravely, ‘that you do not say this kind of thing to anyone save to me?’

‘No.’ She coloured and hesitated: her nature was full of scrupulous truth, and baseness distasteful to her. She always told the truth both in letter and spirit. ‘I have sometimes said something, once or twice, to his cousin,’ she added.

Vernon was surprised.

‘You mean Lord Aubrey?’

‘Yes; he has seen it for himself. He is very kind to me.’

‘I should have thought he had had no time to spend on a woman’s imaginary sorrows.’

‘They are not imaginary, and he knows that they are not.’

She was for the first time strongly angered against her father. He seemed to be unfeeling, cold, and unjust.

‘The more real they are the less would I speak of them—even to Aubrey—were I you.’

‘He is not a stranger. He is a near relative and a dear friend of ours.’

‘A very good friend too. But I should have thought he was sufficiently occupied with his friend Britannia, who, from having been a very virtuous housewife in bib and tucker, is now disposed to unloose her girdle and turn into a revolutionary mænad, and is troublesome accordingly.’

He spoke carelessly, for he did not wish to suggest to her any possible danger in the intimacy of Aubrey, whom he knew as a man of high honour and grave and lofty character. Yet he said more seriously, after a pause, in which they passed down the long white rose-covered colonnade which was a favourite haunt of Guilderoy’s, and where his silken hammock hung at one end ready for his use if he should come there :

‘Still I think it would be well, my love, not to talk of these things, whether they are magnified or not by your fancy and feeling. *Il y a une pudeur de l’âme.* That sounds a sentimental saying, but there is a truth in it. Whenever we begin to uncover our soul we are apt to forget that. We are all apt to lose

that modesty which is after all the chief beauty of all its emotions. I know quite well that women have a need to unbosom their feelings which the rougher natures of men do not experience. But it is after all a weakness, a tendency which even they should contend against, for it is like opium-eating, it increases with indulgence, and in time saps and destroys the whole vitality.'

'I think you mistake,' said Gladys coldly. 'It is not I who confide in anyone. There are things which speak for themselves, and signs which all who run may read. The whole world will not be blind because a man may wish that it should be so.'

'That is true ; but people will not offer us pity if they think we should take it as an affront, any more than they would offer money to a ruined gentleman if he remained a gentleman still.'

'No one offers me pity,' she replied, haughtily. 'On the contrary, they, I believe, share your opinion that because I have made a *beau mariage* I can want nothing more from earth or heaven !'

'I have never said so, Gladys,' replied her father with some coldness.

She was silent ; conscious that she had spoken wrongly ; conscious also that the companionship of Aubrey was chiefly welcome to her because, though he never put it into direct words, he had from the first moment that he had addressed her, given her the sense that he did pity her, and understood why she had reason to be pitied, amidst all which seemed to the superficial observer the supreme felicities and success of her lot.

She knew the fineness of her father's penetration and intuition too well not to be sure that he must see even as Aubrey saw ; and she was angered against him that he did not admit it himself with the indignation which would in her mood of that moment have been refreshing to her.

They had come to the end of the long avenue of white roses ; it was carpeted with the fallen rose-leaves, and overhead the thick foliage, starred with the white blossoms, made the light fall in a green faint twilight about them.

‘Let us talk of something else,’ said John Vernon. ‘Self-analysis is seductive, and Goethe benefited the world by his ; but if we

are not Goethes we are apt to become Obermanns in the indulgence of it; and even if Goethe had less contemplated himself, I for one should have loved him better. "I have been listening to what the vines told me," he said when he was in Italy. I wish he had listened oftener to the vines and less to "the immense Me." What a charming morning, my dear! How the birds sing, and the leaves glisten, and the roses smile! There is so much in life beside our own passions and pains, if we could but think of it. "*Tant qu'un arbre poussera, ce sera bon de vivre!*" Is there not a certain truth in that?'

'To a gipsy, or to a poet,' said his daughter, bitterly. 'When do we have time to see a leaf come out? We are always surrounded by faces. Can one see the sea amongst the crowds on the beach at Biarritz, or the trees in the woods at Homburg, or the sunset as we drive home from the Bois? Of course the sea is there, and the trees and the sunset are there; but to see them in the sense that you speak of is impossible. One may have a day like this now and then, twice in the year perhaps, and then one realises all that one

misses all the rest of the year; that is all. What do I see of all this when we are here with a great party? Of course it is all around us like a *décor de scène*. But I have no time to feel it; there are quantities of things to be done; questions of precedence, programmes of amusement, conversation to make up, toilettes to be changed incessantly, relays of guests to be assorted; of course one feels that the woods are beautiful, that the gardens are charming, but one has no leisure to look at them, or to breathe them in, as it were, as I used to lie under the orchard trees on a summer afternoon, and look through their boughs at the moorlands lying high and purple in the heat; I used to notice everything then, from the dragonfly in the foxglove to the cloud that meant rain for the morrow. But now I notice nothing; I have no time.'

She looked with a sigh through the arched aisle of the rose-charmille.

Vernon echoed her sigh.

'And yet, my dear child,' he said, 'I fancy that if you were still Gladys Vernon living in my cottage, and there were any other Lady Guilderoy reigning here, you would be very

likely to think her lot much brighter and more brilliant than your own. There is always that unkind discontent in human life. The monarch envies the sleep of the cabin-boy, and the cabin-boy thinks if he were only a king with no sea-water soaking his shirt, and no black billows between him and his home! It is always so; it is the rule of existence; and it suggests that Plato may be right, and that we have come from other worlds which are always haunting us and making us uncomfortable in this one.'

He spoke lightly, for he wished her to think her sorrows rather general than individual; but his own heart was heavy. It was indeed no more than he had always predicted and foreseen, but the realisation of his forebodings did not console him for them.

She went back to the London life with a sense of added strength and of restored repose. The long, quiet summer day, with its smell from heather-scented lands blowing through green woodlands and over garden flowers, seemed to go with her, and leave some of its peace in her heart.

How safe and secure and easy life seemed

to her, spent by those grey solitary seas, in that little quiet hollow, under the gorse-covered cliffs where her father's hermitage was made.

Was he right? Would she have been discontented there as years went on? She did not think so. At this moment that simple homely day of country things and country sights and sounds, seemed to her infinitely charming in its peace.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN she reached town after her visit to Ladysrood this day in June, she entered with a sigh the beautiful Palladian house, with its glories of art and architecture, its domed and frescoed staircase, its pomp of powdered servants, and its sweetness of hothouse flowers, dimmed by the grey, sad atmosphere of a sunless London day. The season was at its height; every one said that it was brilliant and delightful; the park was full of equipages and the streets full of well-dressed multitudes; but to her it seemed dreary as any desert, cruel, pitiless, hateful. Life in the country was so much easier, sweeter, safer. All her weight of pain and jealousy seemed to fall back on her like a slab of stone as she entered that mansion which such countless women envied her.

She had only been away three days, but the accumulation of notes and cards and letters of

all kinds was large. She told them to bring her some tea to her boudoir, and having slipped on a teagown made like a sacque of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's from a picture at Ladysrood, she sat there and glanced at her correspondence. It was just six o'clock ; there was a large and important dinner for royalty on her list for that evening, but there were yet two full hours before she need dress for it. She drank her tea all alone, gazing at the roses which she had brought up from Ladysrood in their baskets of moss, and thinking with a pang of how the sun was slanting westward over the moors and the sands of Christslea, and the little birds were flying amongst the ripening apples, and the fisherboys were rowing over the pleasant sea, and all the balmy air was blowing mild and glad through the tossing lilacs and the bushes of homely southern-wood.

If only she had never left these ! How much happier she would have been, let her father say what he might !

She sighed wearily as she breathed the heavy London air ; heavy even here, where all that artificial and natural fragrance could do

to sweeten and to lighten it was done. This beautiful boudoir, with its walls completely lined by old Saxe china, its ceiling exquisitely painted with flowers, its windows draped with lace and cream-coloured satin, seemed to her like a prison after the moorlands, the orchards, and the shore. The hearts in which a deep love of country things is rooted beat ill at ease in cities.

And yet in the country it had seemed to her that its silence and its sweetness made pain harder to bear than when thought was muffled and stifled under the noise and the follies of crowds.

Poor human nature, in pain and anxiety, is like a sick child tossing on his bed, who fancies now this side and now that will give most rest, and finds rest on neither side because there is no rest in himself.

She had not been alone ten minutes before the servant announced Lord Aubrey.

‘Well, dear, so you have been to the country?’ he said, taking her hands in his kindly clasp. ‘It is the best medicine for sick souls, only, alas! we never have time to take it, or we dilute it so with a mixture of the

world that all its virtue goes out of it? How is your father?’

‘He is as well as he ever is,’ said Gladys, and she coloured, for she remembered what her father had said of Aubrey. ‘He said the same as you did,’ she added, after a moment.

‘I was sure that he would,’ answered Aubrey. ‘Think no more of it. Try and enjoy your youth while you can. I have not been enjoying my sober manhood at all at Balmoral. We had five feet of snow on midsummer day.’

And he told her stories of his stay there, and touched on matters of foreign policy in which she had become interested in her attendance at debates. But he found her pensive and preoccupied; she was troubled between her natural instincts of confidence in him and the remembrance of her father’s warning to have no friend amongst his sex.

‘Has Mr. Vernon told you not to put your trust in me?’ asked Aubrey, sadly. ‘I thought he knew me better than to do that.’

‘No, no; he did not tell me so, indeed! He knows how noble and how good you are,’ she said with embarrassment. ‘But he said

that a woman should not have any friend except her husband—that was all, and that it was I who had done wrong to complain to you.'

'But when her husband does not care to be even her friend?' thought Aubrey bitterly, as he said aloud: 'I think your father is quite right in theory, my dear; quite right as a general rule. But, to begin with, I am Evelyn's cousin-german, and am as much interested as you are in his honour and happiness; and, in the second, I am neither a young man nor a thoughtless one. Your father is not, unhappily, enough with you to be your adviser in the world; and I think I may so far try to supply his place without doing or saying anything for which Evelyn would not thank me.'

'Oh, what should I do without you?'

She spoke with warmth and gratitude, and stretched her hand out to him with a childlike gesture of confidence.

'You would do very well, I daresay. Do not make me too vain,' said Aubrey, with a kind smile, as he took her hand, and held it for a moment only.

Her gesture had displaced some of the

notes and cards lying on a little table at her side ; they fell in her lap ; as she took one of them up she gave a little exclamation, and showed the card to Aubrey. On it was the double crown of a duchess by marriage who was a princess in her own right, and under them was printed ‘*Duchesse Sorìa, née Princesse Brancalone.*’

‘Ah!’ ejaculated Aubrey, off his guard for a moment. ‘How is that card here? Do you know her?’

‘I was once at her house in Venice. I suppose she is in London, and called yesterday. I shall like to meet her again. I think she is the most beautiful woman I ever saw in all my life.’

‘She is certainly very handsome.’

‘But we never saw her again, as we left Venice the next day, and I fancied that Evelyn did not like her.’

‘Did you? Why?’

‘He was constrained before her; and he seemed angry that I admired her.’

‘Poor little innocent!’ thought Aubrey. ‘It will be something more trying to you than Olive Shiftton now.’

‘Do you not like her?’ she asked, wondering at his silence.

‘Like her? Well, yes. She is very beautiful, as you say, and, I believe, she is a woman of originally noble character if she had been generously dealt with by fate.’

‘Is she unhappy, too, then?’

‘Her husband was not worthy of her, I believe; and I know that she lost a child she was passionately attached to a few years ago. But I have only seen her in the world. I have no intimacy with her.’

‘It was very kind of her to think of me,’ said Gladys gratefully. ‘I did admire her so much; I was so young and so shy; I felt so foolish before her.’

‘Well, the shyness is cured,’ said Aubrey, with his indolent, indulgent smile. ‘But the youth is not quite over as yet, is it?’

‘I feel very old,’ she said with a sigh.

He laughed; he did not wish to refer seriously to his last interview with her; and he foresaw for her trials much graver than any which she had passed through as yet.

A few minutes later Guilderoy entered the little room. He was looking animated and

interested. He greeted his wife with graceful courtesy, if with little warmth, and asked, with much more genuine feeling, of Vernon's health. Gladys was touched by his tone and pleased by his entrance; it was so very rarely that ever he came there.

'Perhaps it is as my father says, a great deal my fancy and a great deal my fault,' she thought.

Aubrey soon rose and left them together. He felt an irritation which it was impossible for him to display.

'He is only so kind,' he thought, 'because he wants her to receive Beatrice Sorìa.'

In truth, scarcely had the door closed on him than Guilderoy took up the card with the double crown.

'The lady you admired so much in Venice is here,' he said. 'I asked her to leave this on you yesterday. Return her call to-morrow. Show her every deference.'

There was a sound of embarrassment in his voice; but she did not notice it. She promised willingly what he wished.

'I thought in Venice that you did not like her,' she said to him, 'and I admired her so

greatly. You have never seen her since then, of course?'

'Why, of course?' he replied, impatiently.

'Because you would have said so,' she answered in her simplicity.

'I have seen her once or twice in Paris,' said Guilderoy, with some constraint. 'You know she has been in retirement. Sorìa was killed by another Neapolitan, two years ago, in a duel.'

'And how came you to see her yesterday?'

'I met her in the park.'

This was all true to the letter, but not to the spirit. But Gladys, however, was not at that moment critical. She was endeavouring with all her strength to be agreeable and pliant to him, as her father had counselled her to be.

That night she saw the Duchess Sorìa at a ball at Marlborough House. They renewed their acquaintance with a pleasure quite genuine on the one side, if only graciously simulated on the other.

'What did I tell you?' said Lady Sunbury to her cousin Ermytrude as Mme. Sorìa, in all the blaze of her historic diamonds, passed them with her royal host.

That night Gladys was consoled to see that her husband scarcely approached Olive Shiffton, who was present, and who looked very pretty, and a little angered : the small shooting-star disquieted by the rising of this great planet from the south.

‘ Perhaps he is tired of her ; or perhaps it was never really anything,’ she thought, almost reassured ; and she went home at dawn and went to sleep almost happily, dreaming of the quiet waters of the bay by Christslea and the sound of the fishermen’s voices as they pulled up their cobbles on the beach.

CHAPTER XXVII.

‘It was not true certainly,’ she said to Aubrey, a week later. ‘You see he never notices her now, and she looks annoyed. You were right to make me promise to say nothing.’

Aubrey looked at her with an infinite compassion which he could not reveal.

‘It is always best to say nothing, whatever be the provocation,’ he answered. ‘These follies pass. They are beneath notice while they last. They are butterflies; you cannot break them seriously on the wheel of jealousy and anger.’

‘They are poisonous butterflies,’ said Gladys, with a sad smile. ‘And you know the butterfly in one stage of its life devours roses and lays gardens waste.’

‘I know,’ said Aubrey. ‘But other roses come, and the garden grows green again some time or another.’

‘Not always,’ she answered.

‘No, not always, I admit.’

He was a man who believed in great passions and great sorrows. He knew that most passions and most sorrows pass, because most characters are shallow ; but he knew that there were exceptional natures, and that these could never easily find either consolation or oblivion. For these few in the garden of life, the roses once dead, few flowers have fragrance.

Olive Shiffton had been a mere caprice, a mere episode ; but such caprices and such episodes would be repeated *ad infinitum* in his cousin’s existence. How was it possible to reconcile Gladys to this, or even to prepare her for it ? How was it possible even to hint to her that the cessation of this offence to her was due to the presence of another woman whose influence was higher, finer, nobler, but infinitely more to be dreaded ? Of Olive Shiffton, and of all those whom she resembled and represented, Guilderoy was certain to grow fatigued and intolerant with time ; but if Beatrice Soría obtained her power over him again it would be for long, perchance for life.

But it would have been of no use to suggest

any danger of this sort, even if his delicacy and honour had permitted him to do so. Fate is cruel and contradictory enough at all times, he knew ; but it is often better to let her alone to do her worst than it is to meddle with what is vague to us and will surely escape us in our ignorant handling of it.

With that peculiar self-deception which is so common even in persons of the quickest perceptions and intentions, Guilderoy never supposed that his marriage appeared otherwise than most harmonious to the world. He indeed often went out of his way to do things which should show that it was so. In his heart he repented it every hour that he thought about it at all, but it would have been intolerable to him to think that his acquaintance ever suspected he did so. When Olive Shiffton had once ventured a jest about it, relying on her privilege of intimacy, he had silenced her in a tone which it was impossible for her to mistake. If he had adored his wife he could not have been more reverential to her name before others than he was.

‘ Sometimes I think he is fond of her after all,’ said Ermyntrude Longleat to her brother,

on hearing the story of his rebuff to Mrs. Shiffton as it went the round of society.

‘No ; he is not fond of *her*, not in the least,’ replied Aubrey. ‘But he has that sentiment that his wife is part of his own dignity, of his own honour, which so long survives all attachment, and exists even where no attachment ever was, because it is a form of personal vanity. He may slight her himself, but he will let no one else slight her ; that is not a matter of the affections, but of self-love and of family pride. It is the same kind of sentiment which he has for Ladysrood, though Ladysrood *per se* bores him to extinction.’

‘He deserves to lose both Ladysrood and his wife.’

‘Ah, my dear ! if we all had only what we deserve we should be most of us very ill off !’

The season went on its course and closed without Gladys being rudely awakened from this last illusion. Many saw indeed what an utter illusion it was, but no one had brutality enough to rouse her from it, and show her how utterly she was self-deceived.

She only saw that Guilderoy had grown

wholly indifferent to the seductions of Olive Shiffton, and was now never seen beside her. It was not sufficient to make her happy, but it relieved her from her keenest and most harassing anxiety, and she never dreamed that it was the presence of another woman, and not any mercifulness to herself, which made Guilderoy almost rudely neglect and ignore his late diversion.

One glance of inquiring scorn from the lustrous eyes of Beatrice Sorìa, as they had passed slowly in review the attractions and the pretensions of Olive Shiffton, had been enough to make him feel ashamed of ever having felt the sorcery of those inferior and venal charms. He had no emotion so keen as his dread lest any gossip of the town should reveal to the Duchess Sorìa the frivolous story of his latest intrigue. His feeling for the colonial adventures had been so entirely awakened by physical attractions, had been so absolutely void of any kind of higher feeling, or any shadow of esteem, that it became very rapidly distaste or dislike the moment he felt that it might imperil for him the regard and the patience of the only woman he had ever loved.

For he knew now that Beatrice Sorìa held a place in his passions and emotions that no other woman had ever reached. She was lost to him, or he believed her lost to him, through his own fault, his own levity ; but for that very reason his whole soul turned to her as the sunflower to the sun that sets.

He had met her often since the evening in Venice ; but, though he had been frankly admitted to her presence, and treated with friendship and kindness, he had never as yet been able to pass those outer courts ; he had never been able to recover any one of the forfeited privileges of the past ; he had never been able to tell whether she loved him, hated him, or was wholly indifferent to him. All that he could see was that, to all appearance, no one had succeeded him in her affections. The world coupled no one's name with hers, and there was no one of her large circle who could in any way claim any distinction above the rest. That was all which he had been able to ascertain or to divine when he had been in her society in Paris or in Italy ; it was all he could tell now that she was in his own English world of fashion, and renewed her acquaint-

ance with him and with his wife with all the pleasant welcome due to *bonnes connaissances* in society.

The mystery, and what was to him the mortification, of his ignorance of the feelings of a woman who had been once as wax to his hands and as flame to his passions, occupied him and attracted him to the exclusion of almost every other thought.

He had not known what he had felt when he had heard of the death of Hugo Sorìa, in a duel with another Neapolitan. He could not still be sure whether he felt regret at his powerlessness to replace him, or relief that it had been made impossible that he should do so. He was conscious that it must increase tenfold his own offence against the survivor. Who could ever have foreseen so premature a death, for a man young, fortunate, and singularly skilled in all arts of attack and defence? To him it had always seemed probable that Sorìa would long outlive himself.

He had seen nothing of her since her husband's tragic end ; two years had gone by, and it was understood that she was adhering to the strictest rules of mourning and retreat.

Rumour said also, that she had received a severe shock, when in the gay, roseate, sunshine of Naples, after a ball, the dead body of Sorìa, with a blood-stained cloak thrown over his face, had been carried into her presence by the masked bearers of a religious fraternity. She had known nothing of the duel, and was crossing the vestibule to go to her own apartments when the terrible procession came in sight across the sunlight of the marble colonnade. Guilderoy could see the scene as though he had been present at it; the marble arches of the loggia, with the blue sea and the blue sky shining beyond them, the warm, rose-hued light of sunrise streaming in from the gardens, and, glowing in the warmth, the figure of her in her ball-dress and her jewels, pausing in the fascination of terror as the black-robed bearers approached with their burden; he could see it all as though he had been there; he never thought of it without a shudder, and he strove to think of it as little as he could.

Two years had gone by since that time, and she had returned to the world. He had seen her twice or thrice, and had found her more beautiful than she had ever been. If her

thoughts reproached him for his marriage, her lips never did.

‘We will not speak of Hugo,’ she had said to him when he first met her, and strove to say something, he knew not what, of conventional regret. But these were the only words of the least familiarity which ever escaped her towards him, and whether she forgave his own faithlessness to her, or whether she resented it too deeply for all words, he, with all his penetration into the souls of women, could not tell. Anyhow Sorìa was dead, and she was once more free: with her immense personal fortune, her marvellous charm, her great social reputation, and her irresistible power over men, could now be wooed, possibly won, by any living man except himself.

When he recalled the words of his letter of farewell, his cheeks grew red with shame; what could such a woman as she have thought of him when he had abandoned her like any courtesan, hired and dismissed? Perhaps she had despised him too absolutely even to honour him by resentment? He could not tell. Her manner to him remained wholly what it had been in the Palazzo Contarini;

within view of their past relations, such a manner could be but a cloak; but whether what it covered were tenderness or hatred, reproach or offence too indelible for reproach, he could not tell, only he knew that with her it could not be indifference; that was wholly impossible to her whole character.

What motive had brought her to England? True, she was a great lady, allied by friendship and even by blood with many English families, but he felt that she did not come to his country without some intention personally touching himself.

They were in the same world; they must meet again and again even if neither sought to meet; he could not credit that it was either mere caprice, or mere accident, which had brought her to grace the last weeks of the London season with her courted presence.

He had gone to pay her homage, he had been admitted with many others, he had had no word or glance which distinguished him from her other acquaintance; but he had felt the old thrill which her voice awakened in him; he was conscious of the old delirious charm with which she moved him, and life became

for him filled once more with romantic and agitated interest.

‘She is the only woman whom I ever loved,’ he had thought as he left her that day.

He wished his right hand had been cut off before it could have ever written that brutal and ineffaceable letter of adieu. And being a man of the world, he had said to his wife on his return, ‘Call on the Duchess Sorìa : show her every deference.’

That in wishing her to go there he was transgressing against those unwritten rules of custom and social habits by which men of the world are more often governed than by any laws, social or moral, he knew well enough, but it did not affect him. His mind and his feelings were so centred for the time on the woman whom he had lost, that he was insensible to any other sentiment. To have Beatrice Sorìa once more beside him in the rose gardens of Ladysrood as in the years gone by, he would have sacrificed much ; at times he thought that he would sacrifice anything. There at last he could find some occasion to learn whether he were, or not, wholly exiled from that soul in which he had once reigned alone.

To believe, as he was forced to believe, that she had grown wholly indifferent to him was the first humiliation in matters of the heart which he had ever suffered. He knew that he had deserved his fate, and had brought it on himself; but this knowledge only increased the bitterness of his mortification, and the keenness of his anxiety to penetrate the mystery of her feeling towards him.

‘What does she think of me?’ was the wonder incessantly recurrent to his thoughts. She baffled all his desires to learn, as effectually as she had done so in Venice. Ever since he had written that fateful letter in the library at Ladysrood he had never heard, or received from her, one syllable beyond the serene and colourless phrases of an ordinary social intimacy.

The memory of his whole relations with her might have faded out into absolute oblivion for any trace that she gave of seeing in him anything beyond any other of the many acquaintances and admirers who flocked to greet her on her arrival in London.

He seemed forgotten as utterly as no doubt Hugo Sorìa was forgotten, lying in the mausoleum amongst the roses and cypress at Sorrento.

Meanwhile to his wife he was kind. He was grateful to her for her sincere and frankly expressed admiration of her great rival, and he was touched, even whilst he betrayed them, by the unconsciousness and confidence which she showed. After all, perhaps she was becoming facile, he thought; after all she had certainly many lovely qualities.

Curiously enough the influences which most drew his feelings away from her yet made him so far sensible of her merits that he saw more of her and spoke more to her than he had done for months; and she, attributing the change in him to his rupture with Olive Shiffton, was both unsuspecting and almost happy. Perhaps after all, she thought, her father was right; and the silent patience and constancy of absolute devotion might have power over him at the last.

Aubrey, of course, saw her pathetic error; but though his pity for it wrung his own heart, he was too loyal to his cousin and too merciful to her to breathe any hint which could suggest to her the truth. There was nothing in the manner of Beatrice Sorìà to hint it to her. She had been always too

great a lady to tolerate the coarseness of the exhibition of passion in society, and even at the time when Guilderoy's power over her had been strongest, she had never chosen that the world should be able to read their secret in their public attitude. She left such vulgarities to such women as Olive Shiffton, less certain of their influence and more eager to display their dominion than was she. 'When you are sure yourself, what matters who doubts?' she thought now; she was herself wholly conscious that Guilderoy would obey her slightest sign whenever she chose to make one, as the hawk obeys the cry of the falconer. She was in no haste to make it. She had been deserted, humiliated, betrayed; she was not yet certain whether she hated him or forgave him.

'Time will tell me,' she thought, with that strange coldness of patience which runs side by side with the fervours and ardours of the passions in all blood of southern races.

Meantime she called all her wit, intelligence, and beauty to her aid, and obtained with them so great a success in this English world of his that all which the consciousness of other men's admiration of what he had abandoned could

add to his regrets was added to stimulate revived desires. No hand could 'throw the sulphur' with more perfect skill and sorcery than hers. For the most potent of all her charms was that, beneath all the bland arts of seduction and all the polished powers of a woman of the world, there were the richness and the warmth and the unwise impulses of the heart still living and beating if anyone had power to make them live and beat for him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ONE day Aubrey found himself alone beside Beatrice Sorìa at a garden party at Sion House. They had walked on together under the trees until no one was close to them, and the river was before them.

‘We see you so seldom in this idle world, Lord Aubrey,’ she said in her beautiful and mellowed English.

‘Public life is a hard mistress,’ replied Aubrey. ‘She is always saying of one in her jealousy :—

Quod si forte alios jam nunc suspirat amores,
Tunc, precor, infidos, sancte, relinque focos.’

‘She is more unreasonable, then, than other women are in our day, whatever they were in Tibullus’s,’ said the Duchess Sorìa. She was herself fond of the classics, and learned in them like Tullia Arragona, and Vittoria Colonna.

‘ You have no good metrical translation of the Elegies, or the Songs, in English, have you ? ’

‘ Alas, no,’ said Aubrey. ‘ I often wonder they have tempted no poet. John Vernon, though no poet, has made, I think, versions of a few.’

‘ Who is John Vernon ? Ah, to be sure, I remember. He is a great scholar and very charming, is he not ? ’

‘ I think you would like him. He is not of our time. He reminds one of those studious and lettered gentlemen who lived in the quiet of the country in the days of the Georges, and were content as none of us contrive to be content. How do you like his daughter ? ’

‘ Lady Guilderoy ? ’

‘ Yes ; Gladys, as we call her. What do you think of her ? ’

The Duchess Sorìa answered with bland praise. She was a mistress in that delicate art ; she never said too much, but the little she said was sweet as the south wind, and never commonplace. In a few slight sentences she showed Aubrey that she saw the character of Guilderoy’s wife with perfect justice and accuracy.

‘Perhaps she is a little too grave for her years. Men are not fond of gravity, though it is a quality so safe,’ she added with a smile.

‘I do not think she is by nature grave,’ said Aubrey. ‘The world oppresses her. There are natures which suffer in it; suffer from its *banalité*, its artifices, its intrigue, its necessities for dissimulation.’

‘Perhaps,’ said his companion. ‘But when the world is always with us it is better to be interested in it. Like whist, it will amuse our old age when our passions are mere pall-bearers of a corpse.’

‘But there are those who can never feel that interest. She is one of them. What is she to do?’

‘She is in love with her husband,’ said Beatrice Sorìa, with a delicate intonation of scorn. ‘When that passes——’

‘It will not pass.’

‘Oh, my dear lord!’

‘I am convinced that it will not.’

‘You are very cruel to him. He will not be grateful.’

‘No, he will not, unless——’ Aubrey paused and turned to her with a look which

said more than his words—‘unless you, Duchess, who have more influence over him than any one, would tell him that he should be so.’

‘I!’—the word was a haughty refusal in itself.

‘You disappoint me,’ murmured Aubrey. ‘You have so much power, if you would only have as much mercy.’

‘My dear lord, that is not my *rôle*. One cannot preach what one has never practised; one cannot advocate what one does not believe in. I have no belief in conjugal happiness. I believe in the joys of the passions, I believe in the pleasures of vanity, I believe in the consolation of children, and I believe—perhaps—in the sweetness of vengeance. But in these alone. Lady Guilderoy will, no doubt, have all these consolations and pleasures. If she require her husband’s fidelity also she will be disappointed. No doubt she will be at first disappointed very much. But she will also no doubt find out *qu’on peut s’en passer*.’

‘You are cruel to her,’ said Aubrey, with a sigh.

‘My dear lord,’ said Beatrice Sorìa, ‘men wish women to behave to them with sultry heat of passion when they want passion, and with perfect absence of passion when they have ceased to want it. They require the tropics one hour, the poles the next. They want fire out of ice ; when they have effected the transformation they wish the fire to become ice again. Now men are not gods that by the mere exercise of their caprice they can bring about these changes. On the contrary, they ask for such impossibilities and contradictions that they very often make of a woman who was tender, and malleable, and generous before, a very devil, because they have put the devil of pain and injustice into her. Then they are exceedingly surprised at the issue of their work, and if the evil they have created out of good hurts them themselves they are angry, and cry out, for they are children, and bad children : spoilt, selfish, and unkind, never to be trusted out of sight, and always cruel wherever they are loved.’

She spoke with force and warmth and scorn. Her voice was low, but in the mellow and thrilling tones of it there was a concen-

tration of all the indignity, the suffering, the humiliation, disdain, and wrath which had been held in silence in her soul ever since the day that she had received Guilderoy.

She knew that Aubrey was aware of her past relations with his cousin. Circumstances had made him their confidant in the early days of their intimacy; and he had been always on such terms with her as had permitted him some frank expressions of his thoughts. But here he felt that his words had been wasted. She was not a woman to be moved by entreaty or suggestion from any desire or intention of her own.

Aubrey raised his hat and turned away as others approached and occupied her attention.

‘Certainly he behaved very ill to her,’ he thought; and then the paucity and insufficiency of such poor, trite, commonplace words to express the unutterable, ineffaceable, affront which Guilderoy had passed upon such a woman as she was, seemed to him like a renewed insult to her. Why should she show any clemency? None had been shown to her.

And yet he thought one might move her still by her heart if one dared to appeal to it.

But he felt that he could not presume to seek to learn what she felt, whether of hatred or of love, to the man by whom she had been forsaken.

That the wound given her was still unhealed he knew by the profound and mingled emotions with which she had spoken.

Her lover had killed much in her which had been generous, tender, and magnanimous. He had inflicted on her a wound into which all her best feelings and instincts had sunk, as treasure founders in a deep sea. If he suffered in time for the injury he had done, whose fault would it be? Not hers, surely.

Beatrice Sorìa glanced after him as she spoke with her other acquaintances.

‘A man and a gentleman,’ she thought, ‘and a true friend. But how like an Englishman, to have no better way of trying to gain a point than to ask for it!’

CHAPTER XXIX.

‘You have invited Mme. Sorìa ?’ asked Guilderoy, looking over his wife’s list for the house parties.

‘I had not thought of it,’ said Gladys. ‘Will she care to come?’

‘I heard her express a wish to see the English *vie de château*,’ replied Guilderoy. ‘Ask her, at any rate. Ask her in person. I am sure she will not refuse you.’

‘I will try,’ said Gladys.

And she took an early occasion to do so when they met at the last Drawing-room of the season. Beatrice Sorìa did not reply for a moment; a faint smile came on her beautiful mouth. Gladys wondered of what she was thinking. The next moment she accepted the invitation conditionally; it was possible she would not be in England; if she were she would be happy to come to Ladysrood for a day or two.

‘I am very glad,’ said Gladys in her unconsciousness. ‘Pray do not forsake England so soon. Lord Guilderoy is so very anxious that you should honour us in the country.’

‘Lord Guilderoy is always so amiable,’ replied the Duchess Soria. ‘And when his ambassadress is one so irresistible as his wife, his wishes are always certain to be crowned with success.’

‘When she says those graceful things so beautifully, does she mean them, do you think?’ asked Gladys when she recounted the result of her mission to Guilderoy on her return from Court that day.

‘My dear child,’ said Guilderoy with impatience, ‘what a very childlike question! One would think you were on the cliffs at Christslea still! Who ever does mean anything that they say in this world? These pretty things are the mother-of-pearl counters with which one plays the game of society; who has the most of them wins the game. Surely you know that by this time.’

‘I should be sorry to think it was only that,’ she said wistfully. ‘I should like her to like me.’

‘Of course, she does like you ; she has told me so,’ said Guilderoy with some irritation. ‘People would always like you if you were more pliant, more amused, more good-natured. Oh, I know you are goodness itself to all your poor people, and that you are very often doing very kind things even in society, for I hear of them. But that is not the amiability I mean. When we do a favour, nine times out of ten we make a foe instead of a friend, for there are very few natures which a sense of obligation does not sour. The amiability which is successful is the knack of saying things gracefully, of seeming interested when we are bored, of seeming to approve when we disapprove, to agree when we disagree, to make the most uninteresting stranger believe that he is the salt of the earth to us : that is what social amiability means, and you never attempt to acquire it.’

‘It is hypocrisy,’ said Gladys, with scorn in her eyes.

‘It is nothing of the kind. Hypocrisy intends to deceive. Social amiability knows that it deceives nobody—at least nobody who has any knowledge of the world—but it avoids

friction, it polishes, and softens, and soothes ; it gives every one a vague sense of *bien-être*, and diffuses an agreeable atmosphere. That is what you have not, and I fear never will have. You are *très-grande dame* ; that I quite grant ; but you have modelled yourself too much on my sister, and have imbibed her unfortunate ideas that to be virtuous and truthful it is primarily necessary to be what Sunbury calls “*infernally disagreeable*.” It is not my language—it is his, and I ought to apologise for quoting it—but it is really so inimitably descriptive !’

Gladys coloured with indignation. She knew that she was wholly and utterly unlike Hilda Sunbury in every opinion and quality ; she knew that in comparing her to his sister he compared her to what he considered the most unsympathetic and uncompanionable of her sex ; she knew that she had just been doing her uttermost to please him and to succeed in her mission to the Duchess Sorìa ; and she felt unbearably and intolerably wronged by the injustice of his censures and the contemptuous impatience of his tone.

‘I do not think that you have any right

to speak to me in such a manner as that,' she said in a voice which shook slightly yet was very firm. 'I know that you prefer every other woman in society to me; but your indifference should not warp you into injustice and discourtesy. I knew nothing of the world when I married you; I have tried to learn all that I could, and the lesson is hard, or I am stupid. I have not the pliancy and facility of the ladies who are your friends; but I must ask you to remember one thing—it was not I who ever sought you, and my father again and again in vain endeavoured to dissuade you from your marriage with me.'

Before he had recovered from his astonishment sufficiently to answer her she had gathered her train over her arm, bowed to him, and left him.

CHAPTER XXX.

HE had been silent from sheer astonishment at the passionate outburst of one whom he had always considered physically cold and mentally unperceptive.

It was a scene : it was not the first which had taken place between them, but it was the most embittered. There were words in it which stung his conscience, and there were other words which awakened his anger. His very sense that there was a great deal of justice in her reproaches made them the more unwelcome to him. He had thought her unimpassioned, he had even lauded her and been glad that she should be so ; and he saw for the first time that deep down in her soul, under the silence of pride and the ignorance of habit, there were strong and embittered feelings.

He knew women and the world too intimately not to know all that the existence of

this feeling might mean in time for himself. He was a man too sensitive to the world's comments and too intolerant of publicity and interference not to see with the gravest apprehensions the possible approach of his wife's entrance into that stage of suspicion and of irritation which usually precedes and produces an exposure to the world of disunion. He knew that he had only himself to blame; he knew that a little more consideration for her, a little more demonstration of affection on his part, would have sufficed to shut the eyes and lull the soul of so young a woman. He had believed her cold; he had let her drift away from him, content indeed that she should do so; but he had never supposed either that she had felt his neglect so strongly or would ever express her sense of it so openly. The mere thought of a future in which such scenes were possible alarmed him beyond words. Of all things he prized peace, freedom, and apparent harmony.

‘When once they are jealous!’ he thought with a shudder—the shudder of a man who has passed through a thousand scenes of invective and reproach in penalty of his pleasures.

Was it possible, he wondered, that she was jealous of Beatrice Sorìa? Had any one told her the story of his past?

With the yearning remembrance of that one name of magic, he left his house and went where he often went at this hour. It was five o'clock. She was most days to be found at home then, adhering to her indolent Italian habit of never leaving the house till sunset.

The London world was at her feet, and delighted to wait on her. All that was choicest in it had received her gracious hospitality in her own residence at Naples and at Paris, and had many charming memories for which to be grateful of moonlit-garden fêtes at the beautiful Sorrento villa, and dinners of delightful gaiety and wit in her house in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. All that London could offer to her—and it is very much when it is in the mood—it offered in return. The staircase of her hotel was as thronged as the staircase of Buckingham Palace on the evening of a State ball.

She had one of the suite of rooms which are given to royal persons; she had had them

filled with hothouse plants and flowers. The London mists and rain were disgusting things to her ; she strove to forget them as well as she could in the green twilight of palm leaves and the delicate glories of orchidæ.

He found her apartments thronged ; it was known that she was often to be found at this hour. Princes and ministers, ambassadors and ambassadresses, wits and *élégantes* and dandies, all that was most agreeable, exalted, and exclusive in English society were there to do her homage. He was only one in a crowd of great people, most of them greater than he. He remembered with a bitter pang the time when, for his sake, her doors had been closed to all comers.

‘ *Voilà le passé de la Duchesse,*’ he heard a diplomatist smilingly say with a glance at him as he passed. ‘ *Qui sera son avenir ?* ’

The jest made him irritated and mortified. He had been her past indeed !—her all in all, her one exclusive thought, her dream, her empire, her heaven. He had been all that, and he had tired of being it, ingrate that he was ! Who would be as much to her future ? Any one ?

All that baser quality of men's love which is stimulated and strengthened by the spur of social jealousies and the sight of social successes in the one beloved, all that element which is compounded of vanity, emulation, and admiration increased by the world's admiration, all moved in him, intensified besides by the state of anger and offence against his wife in which he had come thither. Never, in the earliest hours of his adoration for her, had he believed himself so passionately the lover of Beatrice Sorì as he felt that he was now capable of becoming. And she had nothing in return for him except the touch of a soft cool hand, the welcome of a sweet bland smile, the wit of brilliant and polished phrases, all which all others there enjoyed; all, and no more than that. Never since the evening when he had seen her in the Palazzo Contarini had he before felt so passionately all that he had thrown away in surrendering, of his own free will, his right to the first place in her presence and in her thoughts.

He had thought her chain too closely fastened on him, and he had cast it off in a moment of impatience and fatigue; but now

he felt that there were no dust and ashes of humiliation which he would not eat if he could only by them once more gain the right to kneel at her feet and to become hers once more. He arrived with the crowd and he was dismissed with it. Never once in all the times that they had met had she allowed him any solitary moment with her. He had surrendered his right to any; he had to learn that such rights could not be resumed at will.

Meanwhile, no sooner had his wife been left alone, than she had grown conscious of how she had sinned against all her promises to Aubrey and all the counsels of her father. She knew that she had lost patience at the very moment when patience would perhaps have rewarded her, and forgotten both wisdom and prudence in the more selfish pain of offended pride.

She had said nothing which was not true; but there are truths which must never be uttered if union and the peace of the future are desired. The very force and indisputable justice of such truth must constitute, she knew, the heaviest accusation and reproach against him. She had set a guard over her lips

through so many trying moments only to fail at the first word which had mortified her.

With the tears streaming down her cheeks she wrote and confessed her fault to her father.

‘I am nothing to him, I know,’ she wrote ; ‘but why must he so often tell me so? If he would let me return and live with you I would do so, and would not complain. But that he would not like, because it would compromise him before the world.’

And then she tore the letter up, and did not send it, lest it should trouble the peace of the solitary of Christ'slea.

A little later she had to repress, as best she could, everything she felt, and go out to a great dinner. The dinner was followed by two or three receptions, at which she had to be seen. She did not look well ; she was very pale, and her eyelids were swollen.

‘How heavy your eyes are,’ said Aubrey, meeting her for a moment that evening in the crowd of a great house. ‘Tell me the truth, dear. Has anything fresh happened?’

‘Nothing fresh,’ said Gladys bitterly, ‘only what I ought to be well used to ; what will never alter as long as I live.’

‘No mortal can say that,’ answered Aubrey. ‘There is nothing really hopeless except death. Whilst a person we love lives we should always deem ourselves happy.’

‘I love no one,’ she said, in a tone which was almost sullen.

‘It is worse than I thought if you have ceased to do so,’ he said gravely. ‘But it is not so. You deceive yourself.’

They were no longer alone, and he had no answer, nor could he tell from any change in her face whether she had been moved by his words. His heart ached to see that mask of almost sullen indifference and apathy worn on her young features. To what extremity might not love which was deserted, and youth which was unhappy, be driven half in despair and half for sake of vengeance? He would not point out the way to vengeance, but other men would. Though her apparent coldness and her contemptuous inattention to them chilled and daunted many of her wooers, yet there were others whom such repulse attracted. She lived in a society and in an age where fidelity is ridiculed or received with incredulity, and wherein compensations and con-

donations go hand in hand, and are rarely refused. How long would she be without learning the lesson which everything conspired to teach her? She might learn it soon, she might learn it late; but learn it some time or other she would assuredly. Has not Ovid said that Helen, being left alone, was innocent of any fault? *Helenen ego crimine solvo.*

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE essay on Friendship had been finished, and had found its way into print in a famous review, though its writer declared it a mere spurious and worthless offspring of the *Lysis*. Guilderoy had on more than one occasion amused himself with casting his thoughts on paper, and the world assured him that he might attain eminence in letters if he cared to do so. But he considered this flattery; and, even had it been true, he would have considered it far too much trouble to obey its suggestion.

Aubrey read the essay when it appeared, and approved of it.

‘Only allow me to say, my dear Evelyn,’ he observed one summer day at Ladysrood, when they were alone on the terrace, ‘that it is odd that any man who has such admirable theories as yours, should go so utterly against them in practice as you do. I know

no living person who is so little heedful of the feelings of others, or so little constant in his own feelings, as yourself. Pray forgive me the remark. I am no doubt leaving good manners outside the temple of intimacy in presuming to make it.'

'You are quite welcome to make it, and no doubt it is true enough,' said Guilderoy, who nevertheless was not pleased. 'I see how things ought to be ; I do not pretend to make them what they ought. I do not think that I am a false friend, as you imply !'

'I do not think you are a friend at all,' said Aubrey. 'You do not care about men's friendship, and with women you have, if you remark them at all, something much warmer than friendship. But what I meant to convey is that, despite your admirable knowledge of the sensitiveness of the human soul, and of what is due to it in intimacy, you entirely neglect observance of those duties.'

'What do you mean?' said Guilderoy, a little annoyed.

'What I say,' replied Aubrey. 'You know the duties of a sympathetic friend, but I fear you never fulfil them.'

‘We are not bound to put our theories into practice. If we were, authors would be a race apart; the missing link between man and the angels.’

‘Yes, I suppose no writer ever did, except Socrates, and he got poisoned for his consistency.’

‘And he was not a writer, by your leave, my dear scholar; only a teacher.’

‘True; but really, Evelyn, your theories are so charming that you should attempt to carry them out in your own life, and perhaps you would be the happier for doing so; egotism is tempting, but it is not always so happy as it looks.’

‘I am not more of an egotist than most men,’ said Guilderoy, moved to a certain irritation. Aubrey raised his eyebrows.

‘In what way am I?’ asked Guilderoy, with petulance. ‘Pray let us speak as if we were at the bottom of her well with Truth.’

‘With all my heart, but Truth, like most ladies, will probably move us to quarrel about her.’

‘Oh, no; pray continue.’

‘Well, have you ever lived for anybody, except yourself, in your life?’

‘For a little while I did,’ said Guilderoy honestly; and he sighed, for he was thinking of the first period of his love for Beatrice Sorìa.

‘Oh, no, you did not even then,’ said Aubrey, who knew what the sigh and the answer meant. ‘It was all self-indulgence, almost all love is; at least when it is victorious.’

‘How can you divorce self and the passions?’

‘Not easily, I admit.’

Aubrey was silent a moment, then he said suddenly:

‘Will you allow me to ask you one thing? Do you think your wife is happy?’

Guilderoy’s face flushed slightly.

‘She is not a happy disposition,’ he said evasively. ‘The world does not amuse her. Then she has lost two children; and she has very over-wrought expectations.’

‘Of you?’

‘Of me, of human nature, of life in general. Because her father has the virtues of a saint and a solitary, she expects every man to be a Saint Jerome or a Basil.’

‘Between Jerome and Basil, and Lovelace and Wildair, there is considerable room for something else; they are at the two ends of the ladder of human desires.’

‘She sees nothing between the saint and the profligate.’

‘A woman usually only sees extremes. But I do not believe she knows anything about profligacy, and I think you could easily make her happy if you chose.’

‘My dear Aubrey!’ cried his cousin with much impatience. ‘If there is a parrot phrase which is absolutely senseless, it is that about making a woman happy! She *is* happy, and you are happy in her happiness, and your own, spontaneously, *sans chercher ni vouloir*, just as birds are in the summer woods; and there is no happiness at all for either of you. Happiness is not a kind of pastry that you mix and roll out and put in the oven till it is done to a turn. It is an immense pleasure, born out of heaven knows what, half of the senses and half of the soul, but no more to be stabled or harnessed than Guido’s coursers that run with Aurora. Happiness elaborately *made* would not be happiness; it would bear the

traces of effort, and would be utterly without charm.'

'Nevertheless in your essay you admit that friendship is a delicate plant, which requires fitting atmosphere and culture ; so also is love surely ; neither will resist neglect.'

'Are you speaking of love ? I thought you were speaking of my wife,' said Guilderoy in that tone of indolent insolence, which was often his shield when he did not choose to be questioned.

Aubrey rose and did not reply. He did not care to continue the argument in that tone ; and he feared that he should say too much if he said anything more.

'Why should you be angry ?' said Guilderoy. 'She might be if she were here. I assure you it is the only word of disparagement which I have ever permitted myself about her. She is exceedingly handsome ; she is immaculately good ; and she is the daughter of the man I most respect upon earth. But all these excellent things do not make up happiness. Happiness is the child of harmony, who the Greeks tell us was the child of Eros.'

Aubrey remained silent ; he felt more anger in him than he wished to betray.

‘You should have married her, not I,’ continued his cousin. ‘You would have suited her most admirably. You would have buried yourselves in the northern mists at Balfrons, and a Blue-book would have occasionally visited you as your only *oiseau bleu*.’

‘*You* certainly should not have ever married at all,’ said Aubrey, who did not care for those jests. ‘Catullus puts Eros and Hymen in the same strophe, but no one else ever succeeded in doing so.’

‘And he did not do it in practice, only in verse,’ said Guilderoy.

‘Hush, she is coming to us,’ said Aubrey, as he saw the tall and slender form of the mistress of Ladysrood approaching the terrace on which they were sitting; the old grey stone terrace of the west front, of which the buttresses and flights of steps were half smothered in virginia creeper and banksia.

Guilderoy rose, and, with that graceful courtesy which he never neglected, took off his hat, and gave her his seat, which was the most comfortable of all the lounging-chairs there. He stayed a moment or two speaking of trifles, and then went away. She looked after him

wistfully. She would have preferred less elaborate courtesy, and more of his time.

‘I am afraid I have disturbed him,’ she said with apprehension.

‘Not in the least ; we were just going away,’ said Aubrey, hastily, as he thought, ‘Good heavens ! is he bored if he has to talk to her for ten minutes ? And yet if she were any one else’s wife, he would spend whole years at her feet I am certain.’

For that one August day he was alone with them. On the morrow some half-hundred of fashionable people were to arrive and bring their London and Paris life into the green gardens and old walls of Ladysrood, which always seemed to its châtelaine in discord with them. But it was only by having the world with him there that Guilderoy could be induced to pass some of the late summer or early autumn months at home. He loved the place in his own way, but life in it wearied him more since his marriage than it had done before, when he had been able to bring with him any questionable preferences of the moment or else stay there in that complete solitude which at rare intervals soothed and pleased him.

Aubrey looked at her where she reclined in the long low chair. She wore a white wool gown without ornament of any sort. Her figure was still very slender, but her bosom was full, and her arms were rounded, her shining hair hung in loose waves over her forehead and was coiled behind in heavy masses fastened with a gold comb.

How strange it seemed to him that his cousin should pass his life in almost absolute indifference to her ! The vision which Guilderoy had in jest put before him of a happiness which might have been possible for himself made his eyes dim for a moment as he gazed at her. But he quickly banished so enervating a fancy, and spoke to her.

‘I wish,’ he said with hesitation, ‘that you could interest yourself more in the life which goes on around you. I know you do not care for it ; your early life unfitted you for it, but it would be well if you could simulate some enjoyment of it ; you would become more popular and Evelyn would be better pleased.’

‘Popular !’ she repeated with the accent of some young duchess of the eighteenth century

to whom some one should have counselled remembrance of the mob.

‘I think it is quite disgraceful,’ she added, ‘the way in which all society, with princes at its head, courts popularity nowadays. I should never have supposed you would have cared for it.’

‘My dear child, princes feel their thrones slipping from under them; they catch at any straw. But I did not mean popularity for you in any low sense of the word. I meant that you would be more generally liked, and so more able to exercise the kind of influence which you would wish to possess. When society is aware that you think it a flock of geese, it revenges itself by hissing loudly behind your back.’

‘It is welcome to do so.’

‘Ah! that tone is just what I complain of; it is too cynical, it is too unsympathetic; you are too young to use it. When the worst is said of it, there remains a great deal that is interesting and profitable to study in society, and when you know that Guilderoy is always anxious that you should be admired and liked, I do not consider that you ought to shut your-

self up in a shell of apparent ill-humour, which is not really in any way your nature.'

'I think it is becoming my nature.'

'God forbid! I hope you will soon have other children with whom you can play on the lawns yonder, and be a child again yourself. Then you will forgive society, which is after all only a very sick and froward child itself, and breaks all its playthings.'

Her face clouded, and she did not reply; her brows were drawn together in a frown, half sullenness, half sadness, as she looked out from from under her long curling lashes at the green woods of the home-park which stretched in the distance as far as the eye could reach.

'You see,' she said at last, 'you see that I can never amuse Evelyn. He does not even talk to me if he can help it. He is always amused and interested with other women; never with me.'

'Perhaps you exaggerate that fancy.'

'Oh no; I felt it in Venice that first year. I am tiresome to him. No one can alter that. It is a calamity; nothing can change it.'

'It is not an uncommon calamity in marriage. Incessant association is so often fatal to

attraction. It is no fault or failure in either very often. Simply proximity has destroyed charm. But I know, dear, this sad philosophy can be no comfort to you. It is as useless for consolation as the cold physiological demonstration of a surgeon to a mother that her dying child has had the seeds of death in him from his birth.'

'Certainly, it does not console me,' she said with a bitterness which was growing upon her every year, more and more. 'Physiology and philosophy explain everything after their own fashion; but I never see that they make anything any better.'

'No,' said Aubrey. 'Whether we are suffering from bodily or mental pain the diagnosis with which our physicians interest themselves has little consolation for us, especially when it leaves us uncured and incurable.'

'Tell me,' she said abruptly. 'You have known him all his life. Is there any woman whom he really loves? Sometimes I think there is.'

'I hope there is—yourself.'

She made a gesture almost of anger. 'Pray do not fence with me, and spare me

these *fadeurs*. One does not look for them from you. Answer my question.'

'I am not in his confidence,' replied Aubrey, which he could say with a measure of truth at least. 'I do not think, if you ask me my frank opinion, that he is a man who has ever distressed himself with a truly great passion. Men who merely seek in love their own self-indulgence are not lovers in the romantic sense of the word, they are not lovers like Montrose or Stradella, or Chastellard. To Henri Quatre, Petrarch would have seemed a poor fool.'

'These are generalities,' she said, impatiently.

'And you want personalities, like a true woman?' said Aubrey with a smile. 'Well, my child, you would not get them from me; even were I in possession of my cousin's secrets, which I am not. I think your greatest enemy could do you no worse turn than to help you to try and rake amongst the cold ashes of your husband's caprices.'

'The ashes may be warm,' she said with impatience. 'Or there may be fresh fires.'

'If there were,' replied Aubrey, 'believe

me you would only make them burn furiously by throwing on them the phosphorus of an irritated and inquisitive jealousy. Believe me, dear, there is only one *couvre-feu* to which a woman can trust to extinguish a glow which offends her ; it lies in her own wisdom and devotion. And do not again try to make me fill the office of tale-bearer. If I knew anything of his affairs, which I do not, I would not descend to such an ignominy, even to serve you.'

She coloured at the implied rebuke, and was silent.

'You are not so amiable as you were, my dear,' said Vernon to her on one of the days in which she was with him alone for a few hours.

'I daresay not,' she answered, almost sullenly. 'The world does not make one amiable.'

'That depends on disposition,' he answered. 'On the whole, I think people who live in it are more amiable than those who live out of it. The friction with others and the variety of interests which it offers tend to give tolerance, pliability, and good humour to the character. The world is to men and women what school

is to children ; at the expense of originality and meditation it teaches social wisdom and moderates over-expectation.'

'To some, at least, it teaches all forms of self-indulgence,' she said bitterly.

Her father looked at her.

'You are thinking of Guilderoy?'

'Yes.'

'Then I think you do very wrongly, my dear. He has many better qualities than his self-indulgence, which is only the necessary outcome of great freedom to enjoy pleasure. Why not dwell rather on those?'

She said nothing.

'I do not think you have followed the counsels I gave you when you first returned here from Venice,' he continued. 'I do not think you at all endeavour to do what I told you to do.'

'What would be the use if I did? He would only consider that I bored him if I offered him any demonstrations of attachment. No one can make the happiness of another person when they are wholly outside the other's life, as I am outside his. I have not the faintest idea of his real interests, his real

desires, or of what he does in the time he is away from me, which is by far the larger part of his time.'

Vernon sighed. He had foreseen it all as clearly as though a magic crystal had shown it to him. But that made it none the less painful to him.

'He is kind to me in many things—I do not deny it—and very generous,' she continued 'But I feel that I am only wearisome to him, just as Ladysrood is, though he loves Ladysrood, and he does not love me.'

'Why should you think he does not? After these years you cannot expect the caresses of a lover.'

'He never loved me, never!' she said sadly. 'It was a caprice. He has so many caprices! He regrets the cost of this one every day of his life, I know, though he is a gentleman and does not say so.'

'Are you sure you are not morbidly fanciful, my child? Cannot you be content with the sense that you are much nearer to him than any other woman can be?'

She smiled. The smile was not the one which had used to come on her face.

‘I am much farther off him than any other woman is! He would tell any stranger anything sooner than he would tell it to me. My dear father! All that you say, they call *vieux jeu* in our world: that world which you think should make me so amiable!’

‘I may have old-fashioned ideas, dear,’ said Vernon, pained by her tone, ‘but however fashions change, I do not think humanity changes so very greatly under them; and *tant que le monde est monde*, I think that a woman will make her own unhappiness by exaggeration of her wrongs, and that a great and genuine devotion on her part will touch any man soon or late.’

‘You are an optimist; he always says so.’

‘Does he? Yet I was very far from optimistic when I endeavoured to dissuade you both from your union.’

She knew that he had indeed done his best to prevent her marriage, and she said nothing more.

‘My dear,’ he added very gravely, ‘the fatal mistake of every woman is to weigh the man in her own scales. You might as well say the rosemary growing yonder in the earth

has the same needs and the same habits as the sea-gull flying over there. It is this horrible pretension, or mistake, or ignorance, whichever it is, in the minds of women which makes their own misery in so much. I am afraid you are now making it, as so many of your sisters have done before you to their cost. The man is all in all to the woman, but she can never be all in all to him, except in some few first hours of delirium. The woman can receive no happiness, physical or mental, save from her beloved; but he can find pleasure, if not happiness, with those whom he despises. “*L’homme aime pour le plaisir qu’il reçoit; la femme aime pour le plaisir qu’elle donne.*” Possession and intimacy confirm and strengthen the passion of the woman; but in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred they destroy the man’s passion altogether, and leave at their best but gratitude or tenderness behind them. These are painful truths which every woman, my dear child, has to learn. The happy women are those who learn, and do not fret at the lesson. The unhappy are those who incessantly strive to resist the laws of nature. I want you to be happy. But happiness will

not come by any effort that you make to dwell, or to force a man to dwell, in an imaginary heaven of impossibilities. Nor will it come through any turbulence or bitterness of jealousy.'

Again she did not reply. Her heart gave no echo to the words, and she felt almost bitterness against her adviser for the tolerant wisdom of them. 'He is not a woman ; how can he tell what one suffers?' she mused impatiently.

'I suppose I erred in her education,' thought her father with sorrow. 'I suppose I forgot that though in so innocent a way, yet she lived wholly for herself when she was with me, and had nothing to teach her how to live for others. It seemed to me very lovely and harmless, that flower-like life of hers amongst the boughs and the birds. I suppose I forgot that it would not fit her for those colder realities which the selfishness of every man makes the woman suffer from when his affections desert her. And yet I tried to make her somewhat wiser, somewhat truer than most women are ; and I used to think I had succeeded. He has undone my work very rapidly—he and the great world together.'

Gladys meanwhile left him with a sense of injustice done to her.

The tender sympathy of Aubrey was more welcome to her than her father's uttered and implied censures. She felt what she had said—that it was of no use for her to be prodigal of her love for a man who was not so much ungrateful to it as he was, from indifference, unconscious of it.

‘I care for him, but then he does not care for me!’ she thought as she drove through the green twilight of the Ladysrood woods.

Who could help that? What effort could change a dead passion into a living one? Sooner would the buried bodies lying in the thyme-scented graveyard, which hung above the sea at Christslea, arise and walk.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE next day Aubrey left Ladysrood, and Guilderoy went to Paris for a week ; at the end of the week their first circle of guests would arrive ; at the end of the second week there were to come to them some royal personages, and with them the Duchess Sorìa.

Gladys had five days of quiet and rural solitude before her. She spent them almost entirely with her father. When the great house was filled the life in it was more tedious to her even than London ; her time still less her own ; her patience and courtesy still more severely taxed. Whatever society might be to others, to her it seemed a treadmill never resting, a *camisole de force* never laid aside, a formula incessantly upon the lips, a conventional imposture never abandoned for a moment. She was a child still at heart, and all its ceremonies and etiquette and precedence were to her

as the weight of her jewels and the length of her train had been to her at her first day at Court. Oh, for one sincere word in the midst of all those polished murmurs of compliment and calumny, and dissimulation, and veiled indecencies, and masked innuendo!—so she thought a hundred times a week in it.

Older women, women either colder in their affections or warmer in their passions, could find interest and excitement in its intrigues, and its conflicting and contrasting interests; they could move in it as in a labyrinth of which they had the silken clue, they could play in it like movers of pawns and knights at chess.

But she could not find that distraction and compensation. There was something in her of her father's distaste for the hurry, the excitement, the falsity, the intrigue, and the incidents, trivial and serious, which make up the interest of modern society had no power to attract and absorb her.

In these few days preceding the arrival of her husband and her guests she was soothed and strengthened by the quiet country atmosphere, in that homeliness and tranquillity which had been about her from her cradle. When she was

with her father, self-sacrifice and fortitude seemed still possible. In the feverishness of the world she lost her hold on them. He tried to make her see that there was nothing new in what she suffered from ; nothing more than was usual and inevitable. He tried to imbue her with that toleration and indulgence which it is the hardest of all trials to attain in youth. He could add little that was new to what he had said when she had before consulted him ; but that little he strove to put before her with sympathy and pity, though its philosophic reasonings seemed very cold to her.

To the imagination which pictures, and the heart which craves, richer, fuller, more complete joys than human passion and human possessions can ever bestow, the assurance that such perfection is but a dream, and that the passions can only be the flower of a day, appears a dreary creed which lays the whole world barren.

‘My dear child,’ said Vernon, ‘you have only found what most women who know much about men do find, that the man they love is seldom either Achilles or Hector, either Sydney or Montrose, either heroic or idealic,

but is generally rather like a sick and fractious child who cries for what he cannot get, and beats the hand which tries to soothe him.'

She smiled but sadly.

'My dear, I only speak thus of my own sex, in their passions,' he continued. 'There are other things in life besides its passions, though I admit that there are none which colour it so deeply, or so infuse into it, irrevocably, bitterness or sweetness. But there are other things; it is in these other things that you should find your allies. Guilderoy is a man whose whole life should not be squandered in falling in love and falling out of love. He has position, opportunity, talent; he should have as time goes on some other aim than breaking the hearts of women, whether your heart or those of others. It is with that side of his life that your alliance, your efforts, your interests, should be. Cannot you see that?'

'I cannot see what does not exist,' said Gladys coldly. 'He has no other object in life than his own pleasure. He says it is the only wise philosophy. I suppose it is, when you are rich enough to carry it out.'

'It is the Epicurean; but what joy will

there be in that without youth? He forgets; he makes no provision for age.'

She was silent; age to her seemed so far off, that it was without shape or meaning in her eyes; her whole soul was concentrated in her present.

Her father looked at her. There were regret, anxiety, disquietude in the regard.

'Gladys,' he said abruptly, 'he told me once that he thought you were cold. You are not so. Far from it. How have you given such an idea of you to a man who is your husband?'

She pulled some little branches of the sweet-briar hedge to her nervously. She did not reply.

'How?' repeated her father. 'You must have failed to respond to him in some way? You must have disappointed him at some time? You must have shut your heart away from his gaze? Will you not answer me?'

Her head was turned from him and her voice trembled as she replied: 'I so soon saw that he cared so little.'

Everything seemed to her be told in that.

'Are you sure that was not your fancy?'

‘Quite sure.’

‘Even when you spoke to me that first day after your return four years ago? You remember?’

‘Yes; even then.’

She sighed impetuously.

‘Even then,’ she repeated. ‘He had paid a great price for me and he regretted the price—just as he does again and again when he bids for a picture at Christie’s, or the Hôtel Drouot, and it falls to him. The picture has never been painted which could satisfy him when he gets it home!’

Vernon echoed her sigh. It seemed to him hopeless to change a state of feeling built on caprice and on indifference, on a temperament as shifting as the sands, and a discontent grown out of self-indulgence. He looked at his daughter with irrepressible sadness.

It seemed such a little while ago that she had run along by that sweetbriar hedge in the sunshine, no taller than itself, a happy, careless, fair-haired child, fresh as a ‘rose washed in a shower.’ And she was here a great lady, an unhappy woman; a jealous and almost deserted wife! He had foreseen it all himself,

but his past prescience of it made its sorrow none the lighter.

Gladys sighed wearily.

Like all persons of poetic and ardent mind her ideals in youth had been high and romantic; the man who had knelt at her feet in the library of Ladysrood with the *Horæ* on her knee and the sunlight through the painted panes falling on his handsome head, had seemed to her, lover, knight, and hero all in one. And what had she found him? Only a master, negligent yet exacting; indifferent yet arbitrary; restless, hard to please, and quite impossible to content; who took his infinite social and personal charms elsewhere; who spent his time and his passions with others, and who considered that he had fulfilled all the obligations of his position to her, when he had given her his houses to direct and his family jewels to wear.

‘Yes, my dear,’ John Vernon said in his own thoughts, silently answering her own silence, ‘you make the common mistake of all women. You think that the gift of yourself gives you claim to the man’s eternal affections. It does not. It cannot. I know this seems harsh

to you, and cruel. But it is the law of sex. Here and there are *âmes d'élite*, who suffice solely and wholly, physically and mentally, to each other; but they have not met early in life, and they have not married each other. Where marriage is hostile to love is, that it substitutes material gifts of worldly goods, worldly advantages, worldly position, gifts of houses and money and land, for the sweet spontaneous gifts of the passions and the affections. In savage races the man can treat his wife how he will, because he has given so many ponies, or cattle, or buffalo-skins, for her. In civilised life he feels in the same way that he has paid for her in material matters, and so is absolved from other and more spiritual payment. There is something to be said for the man's views, only where is the woman who will ever perceive or admit it?'

But all this he could not say to her.

'If you have living children you will be happier,' he said aloud, as the only suggested consolation of which he could think.

Her face flushed, and she rose and pulled the shoots of the sweetbriar impetuously off their stalks.

‘I shall never have children,’ she said in a low and sullen voice. ‘Do you suppose that I would live with him—without his love—only because he wishes for legitimate offspring? Cannot you understand? I have made him know that ever since—ever since—I first felt that he did not care for me.’

‘And he accepts the condition?’

‘When I tell you that he does not care?’

The colour burned in her cheeks; a dark cloud of anger hung over the fairness of her face.

‘One sees it in the world, I know,’ she continued: ‘women who go on bearing children year after year to men whom they know care nothing for them, but they must be without spirit or senses, or dignity or delicacy; they must be the wretched beasts of burden that your Griseldis was!’

Her father looked at her with infinite pain.

‘It is worse than I thought,’ he said briefly. ‘I do not know how far he may be to blame; he has never opened his heart to me, and I cannot judge; but I do not think that you cherish the spirit which can bring happiness either to you or him. And I do not think that

you have any right to refuse that natural burden of maternity which, however little you knew of life then, you still knew would be your portion if you married him.'

'The moment that he has ceased to love me, he has set me free from all such obligations,' she said passionately. 'My little children lie in their graves. When I shall lie with them, he can have others by some other woman, who will be more grateful for his gifts and his position than am I.'

'You pain me, Gladys,' said Vernon, with a sigh.

'I cannot help it,' she replied, selfish with that concentration of self which the sufferings of the heart and passions always entail.

'When I am with you,' she said with the tears rising to her eyes, 'I am in much what I used to be. I feel your influence. I believe as you believe in the power of self-sacrifice and patience. But I leave all the good you do me within this little gate. I cannot carry it out into the world. There I am only foolish, jealous, embittered, made cold or made wicked, one hour this, one hour that. In the world I see that women who are forsaken find consola-

tion. Why should I not find it if I can? One of your classic writers says somewhere that a woman has always *one* power of vengeance. Sometimes I feel that I will try and reach his pride with that, since I can touch in no better way his heart !'

Vernon was silent for some moments ; he understood all the conflicting impulses at war within her, and he was at once too merciful and too wise to meet them with the empty conventional arguments of what is called in the world morality. He believed, like Aubrey, that it is only by the affections that women can or should be ever led.

' Other women have done that,' he said at last, ' and have repented it all their lives long. We cannot wound what we love without wounding ourselves more profoundly still ; and to dishonour ourselves because we feel ourselves humiliated seems to me the act of madness ; it would be as wise to cut our throats because the cold makes our hands ache on a winter's day. By what you tell me, you have set free your husband by your own choice ; you cannot complain if he construes his liberty with a man's liberal and loose reading of the word.

You have been too quick to consider yourself neglected, and too quick to repudiate your own obligations. You have beauty, you have youth, and you have the honour of the man you love, or have loved, in your hands. If with all this you can obtain no influence on him, and cannot rise to a higher level than that of your own personal affronts and suspicions, you are not what I thought you; and all the care and culture I have given to you, and all the efforts I have made to render you in some little degree wiser and kinder than other women, have been lost. To feel that it is so will be the crowning disappointment of my life, which has been neither so tranquil nor so contented as others think it. For I am mortal, and I have found, like all mortals, that "life is a series of losses." Do not let me lose you at least.'

She was touched to the quick, if she was not convinced. The tears fell upon her father's hand as she kissed it.

But she promised nothing.

'Do not let us talk any more of this,' said Vernon. 'Feeling loses its force and its delicacy if we put it under the microscope too often, whether you be living or dead. I believe

that you will always live your own life in such wise as I should most wish. In dishonouring yourself you would dishonour me ; you will remember that. Let us go down to the shore. Nothing soothes one like the sound of the sea. Who has been mistaken enough to say that Nature was not loved in classic eyes? Why, all Greek and Latin verse is full of it, from the roar of the waves in Homer to the chaunt of the grasshopper in Meleager, and the birds singing in the rosemary of Tibullus !'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

VERNON was seated a few days later in the wicker chair of his garden, with a volume of Terence on his knee, and the dog at his feet, when the old woman in cotton kirtle and coalscuttle bonnet, who served as letter-carrier for some twelve miles round, brought him a packet of publishers' letters, and newspapers, and pamphlets, and one other letter in a hand unknown to him, and enclosed in the thick blue paper which usually bespeaks a legal correspondence. When he read it he found himself the master of a modest little fortune. A very distant relation in the colonies, from whom he had had no communication for twenty years, and of whom he had scarcely ever known anything, had died childless, and had left him the proceeds of a long life of sheepfarming, 'because he is the only honest man I have ever

heard of,' said this New Zealand Diogenes in his testament.

The letter of these lawyers, who were wholly strangers to him, moved him to a mingled emotion. He could not but be thankful that his future years, brief as they might be, would be freed from the *atræ curæ* of reliance on precarious literary labours; but his heart ached that this good news had not come earlier. A reluctant consent had been wrung from him to Gladys's marriage, principally because he knew that the state of his health might any day leave her without a protector, and that he had not means to bequeath to her any ease or elegance of life. This knowledge had made him conscious that he had no right to stand between his daughter and the brilliant and secure position offered to her, from mere romantic apprehensions which the future might never realise. But if this little fortune had come to him before the visit of Guilderoy, he would not have hesitated to place the test of long probation betwixt him and his desires. Alas! when fortune stretches out full hands, it is so often too late for her gifts to be of much use. Still he was thankful

as he sat in the pale sunshine amidst the honeysuckle and sweetbriar of his cottage porch.

He loved learning with all a scholar's tender and delicate devotion, and it had often seemed to him almost a prostitution of it to turn his command of its treasures into a means of making money. A sentimentality the world would have called it, as it always calls so every better emotion in us.

As he sat thus he heard the rapid trot of horses' feet coming up the sandy lane, sunk low between high flowering hedges and banks which were in spring purple with violets.

'Someone from Ladysrood,' he thought.

Ladysrood had become full of guests, and Vernon never consented to go there when there was a house party; he pleaded utter disuse of society, and distaste for it; and, indeed, few of the associates of Guilderoy had much in common with him. And he had an unchangeable resolution never to give any human being the right to say that he had gratified his own ambition, and secured his own interests, by his daughter's alliance.

'Why should you persist in remaining so

aloof from us?' Guilderoy had said to him that same morning; and Vernon replied:

'Why should I renew acquaintance with the great world when it and I have been strangers so long? My life must seem to you like that of a snail or a mollusc, fastened under a cabbage-leaf or a ribbon weed. But it is a contented one. Can you say as much for yours?'

Guilderoy was at a loss what to answer.

'You are the only contented person I have ever met,' he said evasively.

'I am content because I have done with expectation,' replied Vernon. 'What is discontent? Only desires which are incapable of fulfilment. I quite understand that the whole tenour of modern life inevitably produces it; that is why I live chiefly with the dead.'

'A waste of your great intelligence, and a deprivation to those who appreciate your society,' said Guilderoy.

'My dear Evelyn,' said Vernon, 'I am not vain enough to believe in your flattery. Whatever my intelligence may be worth I can put on paper, and if any really care for my society they can come to Christslea—as you come.'

Guilderoy coloured a little. He was sen-

sible that he came but seldom there. And yet he had great affection and admiration for John Vernon.

‘It is a very great pity that he remains such a recluse,’ he said once to Aubrey, who replied : ‘You think my life distressingly wasted on the country. You think Vernon’s distressingly wasted on solitude. He and I think yours distressingly wasted on pleasure. Which of the three of us is most right?’

‘Probably we are all three extremely unwise to judge of, and for, others.’

‘That may very well be. Possibly, too, all life is more or less wasted because men, with all their studies, have never studied the secret of truly enjoying it. Possibly, too, Vernon in his hermitage is nearer doing so than either you or I.’

But though he had never gone thither, those of the guests of Ladysrood who had learning enough to appreciate it often sought his society, and the little cottage under the apple orchards had become a sort of intellectual Delphos to those men of genius and learning who were numbered amongst Guilderoy’s friends. It was no one of these now, but

Hilda Sunbury who lifted the latch of the little wooden gate and came under the wild rose boughs to him.

Having begun by hating him as an adventurer and an eccentric solitary, she had ended in admiring him and esteeming him. 'The only really sensible man I ever met,' she often averred.

Vernon, on his part, liked her; he appreciated her strong attachments and her strong common sense which yet so denied her those true charms, sympathy and the power of silence. She had now driven over alone, ostensibly to consult him about one of her sons, but in reality for another purpose. When she had spoken of her son, of politics, and of the weather, she hesitated a moment, and then said:

'Mr. Vernon, you and I have one common object and desire, the happiness of my brother and your daughter.'

'Certainly, my dear lady,' replied Vernon; 'but if you mean that either you or I can do anything except wishing for it, you are greatly mistaken. I have told you so very often.'

'A word in season surely——'

‘ Ah, no ! It is just those words which are always most aggravating ! I am sure you have some bad news for me. Spare me, and tell it quickly.’

‘ I ought not to tell you at all. But you have heard of the Duchess Sorìa ? ’

‘ Never.’

She gave him the outlines of the Duchess Sorìa’s past so far as it had been connected with her brother, and Vernon heard with impatience.

‘ It was broken off before his marriage, no doubt,’ he said. ‘ Why rake amongst dead leaves ? ’

‘ Because leaves grow again.’

‘ You mean—— ? ’

‘ That Evelyn is more in love with this woman than he ever was before, and that she comes to Ladysrood to-morrow. Now what I wish to know is, shall you or I tell your daughter ? ’

Vernon heard with infinite pain.

‘ I knew how it would be,’ he murmured. ‘ But I confess it is sooner than even I thought. My child is worth more than that. Perhaps you mistake.’

‘ I never mistake,’ she replied, with hauteur ;

‘and if I sacrifice the reputation of my brother to you, it is out of sincere regard for your daughter.’

‘What do you want me to do?’

‘Whatever you deem best. She must certainly not be left to remain in ignorance to receive Beatrice Sorìa——’

Vernon sighed.

‘Dear madam, it is only ignorance—unless most wondrous and perfect patience—which enables any woman to endure her married life at all.’

‘You mean, then, you would leave her in ignorance?’

‘Yes. What good could knowledge do if it be as you think?’

‘Good heavens! Surely there is such a thing as self-respect?’

‘Yes; my child will always have self-respect, for she will never, I am convinced, do anything to lose the respect of others. Self-respect does not consist in making violent scenes, or ill-judged reproaches, or discoveries which are for ever fatal to peace.’

‘You take the insult to your daughter strangely quietly.’

‘ I have known the world in my time, my dear madam, and I read your brother’s character before he had been ten minutes in my study ; it is not a character from which any woman can expect constancy. I thought, however, that he was a gentleman ; if he is as insincere and as unscrupulous as you describe he is not one.’

‘ Not a gentleman !’

Lady Sunbury flushed crimson, and rose in bitter anger.

‘ Not if what you tell me is true.’

‘ I did not tell you that he might be abused, but argued with ; and that your daughter might be warned and counselled.’

John Vernon sighed wearily.

‘ Dear Lady Sunbury, you and I both spent all our intelligence in warnings and in counsels before this marriage took place. Action, now that it has taken place, would be worse than useless.’

‘ My intentions are misunderstood,’ said his visitor coldly. ‘ All my inclinations would, of course, lie towards screening and excusing my brother. But I thank God that I have never allowed mere inclination to be the guide of my

conduct. I believe in duty, though I know the world of our day ridicules and despises me, and my sense of duty made me feel that I could not allow my sister-in-law ignorantly to receive her most formidable rival.'

'I thank you for your feeling for Gladys,' said Vernon, with emotion. 'But neither you nor I should do any good in lifting the band off her eyes; it will fall enough of itself. Besides—pardon me—you cannot tell that Guilderoy's feelings have revived for this lady. He cannot have told you, I presume?'

'He has not told me, certainly. But I have always taken means to be aware of my brother's actions, and I know that all relations are renewed between him and the Duchess Sorìa.'

Vernon covered his eyes from the sun with one hand. The calm sweet light and the gay song of the mavises in the adjacent orchard hurt him.

'It is very sad if true,' he said at last. 'But interference were worse than useless. It would only confirm your brother in his infidelity, and inspire in my daughter a resentment which she could never forget. Dear

madam, believe me, marriage is a difficult thing. But, as law stands, we cannot undo one once contracted without publicity, comment, interrogation, every indignity which it is most frightful for either a proud or a delicate nature to provoke. What then remains? Only to leave such peace as there is in it undisturbed as long as we can. I know that you believe in the advantages of interference. I do not. When we are sure to do any possible good by it, it is a dangerous meddling with fates not our own. When we cannot even be sure of so much as that, we certainly cannot dare to attempt anything. Your brother's wish for my daughter's hand was, as you know, most unwelcome to me, because I knew that he had not the stability, nor she the experience, to make happiness between them possible. But since, unhappily, she *is* his wife, she shall not, I promise you, whilst I live, allow either passion or injury to fling his name to the howling calumnies and cruelties of the world; not whilst I live.'

There was a great sadness in the three last words, and he sighed as he said them.

'When I am gone, be kind to her,' he added.

‘Where are you going?’

‘Where we must all go.’

Hilda Sunbury looked at him in surprise and wonder.

‘Why should you speak so? You are as likely to live as she or I. You are in the full vigour and flower of your intellect.’

John Vernon smiled.

‘Of my intellect, perhaps; but, unhappily, living is a physical question, and when the body succumbs the light of the mind goes out too. I have always thought it the greatest argument for the immortality of the soul, for it is really ridiculous to suppose that the hemlock could really destroy such a mind as Socrates, or that the genius which created Ariel and Caliban can have been killed for ever because Warwickshire leeches in the Elizabethan days were fools. Plato, indeed——’

Lady Sunbury rose in evident irritation. ‘Socrates and Plato! Good heavens, Mr. Vernon, how can you possibly think of such people when I have just told you, at the greatest pain to myself, and perhaps even disloyalty to my brother, of what wrong is being done to your only child!’

‘My dear madam,’ said Vernon wearily, ‘if my child ultimately succeeds in keeping the honour of your brother’s name intact, and bearing her own pain and dishonour in silence, she will owe it to that which I have told her in childhood of those two dear dead friends of mine. Perhaps you have never read the “Apology” or the “Crito” ? Horace has said that a new amphora keeps long the odour of the first wine poured in it ; and as it is with the earthen vase, so is it with the human mind in youth.’

Lady Sunbury left the garden of Christslea with offence.

She reflected that it was always wholly useless to look for practical wisdom from the students of books.

She had been born with an ungovernable love of interference with the affairs of others. She believed so conscientiously in the excellence of her intentions, that she was sincerely ignorant of the curiosity, love of authority, and many another personal motive, which were continually moving her to interfere to govern the destinies and to correct the errors of others. Her detestation of the

Duchess Sorìa had been to the full as potent in her present action as her anger with Guilderoy and her indignation for the wrongs of his wife. Like many another woman of energy and exclusive attachments, she could not resist the feeling that she had been appointed by Providence to watch over, and save from themselves, all those who belonged to her ; and though this view of her mission had never yet had any other result than to alienate and weary those whom she desired to serve, and frequently to hasten their descent down that path which she sought to prevent them from ever following, yet she never could so alter her nature as to refrain from making the attempt. Her husband hated, her sons feared, and her brother often avoided her in consequence, but no power on earth would ever have persuaded her that her failure to influence them arose from her own fault. Alas ! most people carry about with them a lanthorn like Diogenes, but they are for ever flashing its rays into the faces and the souls of others ; they do not remember to turn its light inward.

Lady Sunbury indeed knew—no one better—that a woman can no more restrain a man

from inconstancy than she can restrain the breakers of the sea from rolling up on to the shore. She knew, too, by her own experience, that rebuke, reproach, expostulation, publicity, only increase the evils against which they passionately protest. But she did not choose to remember anything of what she knew. She was only ready to blame her brother's wife for too passive acquiescence, as she would have blamed her had she had recourse to any violent indignation. She could not pardon her for having gained no influence over Guilderoy, even as she would never have forgiven her had she succeeded in gaining any. She knew that her sister-in-law was unhappy, and that such unhappiness was at her age perilous in every kind of way; but yet she was rather impatient of her and critical of her than compassionate. If she were not a simpleton she was wicked, quite wicked, not to take such measures as would save her husband from unfaithfulness and herself from sorrow.

And she, who had forgotten the saying that 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread,' or else never imagined by any possi-

bility that she could be classed with fools, drove rapidly home to Ladysrood, where a large party was staying as well as herself. 'It will be very difficult to see her alone,' she thought, 'but I will try.'

As it chanced, Guilderoy was out riding with several of his friends; the remainder of the guests were sitting, sauntering, or playing afternoon games in the west gardens. There was a large table spread under one of the great chestnuts, where servants were serving tea, ices, fruits, wines, strawberries and cream, everything that was wished for or imagined. Gladys was performing that part of mistress of a great house which had now become second nature to her, but which never ceased to oppress and fatigue her with its tedium.

Society, like all other pursuits of life, requires to have an object in it to be interesting. She had no object; it did not seem to her that anything of interest could possibly arise in her life. She had pain in it, and a jealousy for which she condemned herself, but these had both become so familiar by habit that she had ceased to expect ever to be free from them. Her want of interest in what went

on around her gave her a listless air, which all her really sincere efforts to be kind and courteous could not repair. People felt that they were indifferent to her, that they bored her, that she would have preferred their absence to their presence, and there were many whose vanity made them bitterly resent this. She was moving now from one group to another, doing her best to be amused by what so greatly amused every one else, and failing entirely to be so. She wore a Gainsborough hat, with long feathers drooping to her shoulders ; she had on a white frock of very soft embroidered gauze tissue, and a great sash of broad pale blue ribbon was fastened at the side.

‘She is really a lovely creature,’ thought her sister-in-law ; ‘how wild he would be about her were she only some one else’s wife !’

Lady Sunbury joined the groups under the chestnuts and bided her time. It was still early. There was a great deal of laughter and flirtation and general diversion, the air was balmy, and the gardens delightful. Some one asked if they might dance, the lawn was so smooth ; the lady of Ladysrood assented ; the musicians, who were always in the house, were sent for, and

stationed where they were not seen behind thickets of rhododendron; the people began to dance.

Gladys and Lady Sunbury were left almost alone.

‘How strange that they can care for *that!*’ said the former, with dreamy contempt, as she watched the valsers moving round.

‘How I wish you cared for it, my dear!’ said Lady Sunbury. ‘How I wish you cared for anything.’

‘Do you?’ Gladys looked suddenly at her with a strange expression in her eyes.

‘Certainly I do,’ said her sister-in-law. ‘You would be so much happier if you were—were—interested in what goes on around you.’

‘I am very often interested; I am not often pleased.’

‘What does she mean?’ thought Lady Sunbury.

‘I wanted to say something to you for a moment in private. Could we go a little apart, do you think? They are all dancing.’

‘Oh yes. They will not miss me.’

She moved away from the gaiety of the scene into a walk known as the King’s Alley,

because Charles Stuart had paced up and down it in the dark days between Oxford and Whitehall. It was a green walk enclosed on either side with tall walls of clipped yew, above which stretched and met the boughs of massive beeches. It was sequestered and out of earshot, though the music of the waltz came to them on the air as they paced down it.

‘You care for your father?’ said Lady Sunbury.

‘Ah!’ It was an ejaculation rather than a word, but the whole love of a lifetime was in it. ‘It is no ill of him you want to say, is it?’

‘Oh no,’ said her sister-in-law. ‘I went to see him this afternoon. I wanted him to tell you something which must be told you. But he refused.’

‘Be sure that it should not be told at all, then,’ said Gladys coldly.

‘Mr. Vernon is not infallible,’ replied Hilda Sunbury, growing angered. ‘I consider that it should be told, and I am the best judge of what is or is not for the honour of my family. I do not wish you to receive the Duchess Sorìa.’

Gladys stood still and looked at her.

‘Why?’ she asked.

‘Because—because my brother was her friend—more than her friend—before his marriage.’

‘My dear Lady Sunbury,’ said her brother’s wife very calmly, ‘if I am to decline to know all the women whom your brother honoured in that manner, I shall have to make great excisions in my visiting list.’

‘Good heavens! Can you make a jest of it?’

‘No; God knows that is farthest from my thoughts. But the world would make a jest of him if I acted on your advice.’

‘Do you mean to say that you were aware of what his relations were with Beatrice Sorìa? and what they have again become?’

Gladys grew very pale.

‘I knew there was something—some one—it does not matter who—it is not the first time.’

Her voice was faint with pain, but her face was calm.

‘Are you sure that it is Mme. Sorìa?’ she asked after a moment’s pause.

‘Perfectly sure. You cannot let her come

here ; you must make Evelyn understand that. I speak as I do for your honour and his.'

'Or for our estrangement,' thought Gladys bitterly.

'My father said I was not to be told this?' she inquired.

'Yes ; he said it could do no good. He did not appreciate my motives, my sense of duty.'

'Neither do I,' said Gladys abruptly ; and she began to walk on under the beechen shadows.

'I am sorry that you do not,' said Lady Sunbury sternly. 'You are nothing to me, and my brother is much. But I could not see a wrong done to you under your own roof while I could save you from it by a word of warning. It was useless to speak to Guilderoy ; he is self-willed, careless, obdurate, where his fancies are involved. I deemed it best to put you on your guard. If *you* tell him you refuse to receive the Duchess Sorìa he will be compelled to acquiesce, and he will not ask your reasons and he will be saved from the world's condemnation.'

Gladys said nothing in answer. She con-

tinued to pace the alley with agitated, quickened steps.

‘Have you a personal dislike to Mme. Sorìa?’ she asked abruptly.

‘That is a very unworthy insinuation,’ replied her sister-in-law with hauteur. ‘This much I will say of her—she is the only woman on earth who ever really influenced my brother. You must be aware that you yourself have no more influence over him than if you were a statue; of course I do not know whether that is his fault or yours.’

Each one of the words went to the heart of the hearer as if it had been a stab with a knife. Had it been her fault? Her father also had seemed to think so. Her sister-in-law evidently thought so. What did women do to retain the passion and elicit the confidence of men? She could not tell. Who could put in her possession the secret of that marvellous talisman? She turned to her companion with composure, though her lips were very pale:

‘I have no doubt you mean well, though you might find it hard work to persuade Lord Guilderoy that you do so. Mme. Sorìa does

not come for three days. In the morning I will go to Christslea and consult my father.'

'Your father will certainly counsel you to keep the *rôle* of Griseldis,' said Lady Sunbury with ill-repressed rage and violence.

Gladys' face flushed painfully.

'If I do keep it,' she said with bitterness, 'it is certainly the members of your house who should be grateful to me.'

Then she walked with quick firm steps away from her sister-in-law, out of the shade of the beech-alley, and towards the dancers in the sunlight on the lawn.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

JOHN VERNON having accompanied his visitor to her carriage, had walked slowly back to his little house. He had felt infinitely more emotion than he had shown to her, for although not unexpected, the tidings she had brought to him had been none the less cruel. And he felt, as he had said to her, that all intervention would be useless, worse than useless. When two lives are drifting apart, their own regrets or relentings can yet unite them, but the interference of any other can only send them wider asunder.

He sat down again in his willow chair, with the sunshine about him and the bees buzzing in the honeysuckles. His left hand was still closed unconsciously on the letter from his dead cousin's lawyers. The emotions of pleasure and pain had exhausted him ; they were the perils against which he had always been warned. His tranquil

life amongst his books had alone preserved so long his fragile cord of life.

As he looked at the gay sunshine with the gnats and flies dancing in it, the tangle of green boughs through which the blue of the sea was shining, the fragrant sweetbriar and southernwood where two little blue tomtits were flitting, to him there seemed so much—ah, how much!—that was unutterably beautiful in existence. Why would youth and manhood fret themselves away in the fierce and heated furnace of passions which were no sooner attained and enjoyed than they lost all power to charm? If youth would only believe how much else there is to enjoy! If age, which does know, had not lost the power to enjoy all!

‘*Si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait!*’ he murmured, in the old trite true sad words of human existence which has no sooner time to learn its secret than it has to pass away where there is no more use for its hardly acquired knowledge. What cruelty and mockery there were in this brief saying. If he could only put his own knowledge, his own patience, his own experience into the heart of his child!

He felt tired and sad, and the pleasantness

of the little gift of Fortune which had come to him was forgotten in an aching anxiety for the fate of one dearer than himself.

‘If she be ever forced to leave him,’ he thought, ‘she will be too proud to keep her dowry, she will have this to live on ; it is well so far.’

The afternoon was very warm and sultry ; there was no sound but of the buzzing of the bees and the murmur of the sea on the shore. He listened to that sound, which seemed like the beating of the heart of Nature.

‘If we could listen more to that, and less to our own, we should be happier while we live, and readier for death,’ he thought, as he leaned his head back in the chair and closed his eyes. He felt very weary. He rested there very quietly.

The hours passed, and the sun sunk down, and the little birds in the sweetbriar and southernwood began to think of their bedtime, safe under their abode of leaves.

The dog at his feet looked anxiously up at him from time to time. The reflection from the setting sun shone on his face, which was very white and very calm, and there, when the

shadows of the evening came about him, his old servant found him sleeping. He had died in his sleep, without a pang. There was the shadow of a smile on his pale lips.

He had gone in peace to the great majority, whither had gone before him the great souls whom he had loved in life.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AT Ladysrood the long dinner was over by half an hour; the drawing-rooms were filled with gay groups; there was the sound of pleasant laughter and of sweet voices, and of the beautiful melody of Wagner's Spinning Chorus, which was scarcely listened to or heeded by any one. In the midst of that soft animation and polished mirth, the groom of the chambers, bending low to his master, murmured an almost inaudible word; Guilderoy grew very pale, and with a hurried phrase of apology, left his guests. In the library he found the old gardener of Christslea, who had come thither to tell him that John Vernon was dead.

‘God forgive me!’ was his first thought. ‘Will *he* ever forgive me if he be gone where he can know all?’

CHAPTER XXXVI.

‘ My child, you and I have lost the best friend we had on earth. Let us endeavour to live together as he would most have wished us to do,’ said Guilderoy with sincere emotion, when he had left all that was mortal of John Vernon in the little graveyard by the sea at Christslea.

She sighed ; she did not respond.

The party at Ladysrood had of course been broken up immediately, and there was no question for the moment of the arrival of the Duchess Sorìa. Of the personal impatience which he felt at this disappointment to himself Guilderoy gave no sign to his wife. He was sincerely sorry for her, and he forbore from any kind of word or hint which could have added to her sorrow. He was for the first time in his life wholly unselfish. But the consciousness that he was doing his duty did not prevent the tedium of those solitary days of

mourning from weighing heavily on his spirits, and taxing his patience cruelly. He was wholly unused to either the sensation or the spectacle of pain.

In the overwhelming shock and grief to her of her father's death, all other memories and feelings had been for the time forgotten or thrust aside. Guilderoy had shown to her in her suffering a genuine tenderness and sympathy which had been wholly unaffected, as he himself bitterly regretted the loss of one whom he had regarded with affection, and whose loss was irreparable he knew to her, perhaps to them both. The cottage at Christslea had been the one temple of peace in which neither of them would ever have been ashamed to confess error and seek reconciliation. But John Vernon was dead, and all that remained to them of him were his books and papers, his written and printed thoughts, and the letter which had been found in his dead hand.

He was moved to greater regret when he read and arranged the innumerable papers which Vernon had left behind him, and felt conscious, at every line, of how much nobility of mind and rich maturity of intellect were

quenched for ever under the wild thyme and moss which covered the little burial-place where he lay.

Guilderoy did not share that hope which sustained the souls of Socrates and Plato, and which the soul of John Vernon had drunk in from theirs. To him it seemed that *quand on est mort, c'est pour longtemps*: a time so long that it stretches on to all which mortals can conceive as for ever. And his eyes were often wet with tears as he turned over the manuscripts of his dead friend.

The sincerity of his own sorrow did not diminish the intolerable sense of dreariness with which these late summer weeks at Ladysrood filled him. On the contrary, he became impatient, even of his own regrets: he was so wholly unused to harbour as a guest any thought or emotion which was not pleasurable that he resented his own pain.

These long silent summer hours in this house of mourning, with the figure of Gladys in its long black robes always before him, and no other distraction possible, tried almost beyond endurance the good resolutions which he had silently formed as he looked on the pale serene

countenance of Vernon lying in his last sleep on his narrow bed, with the lattice of his chamber open to the blue sky, the twittering birds, the quivering leaves, the murmurous sea.

A man of his temperament is quickly touched to fine issues, to honest regrets, to tender resolves; but there is no power on earth which can secure his adhesion to them.

He showed her the most sincere sympathy in her grief, and was even perfectly patient with its intensity and long duration. He had felt the truest admiration and attachment on his own part for her father, and had always felt that Vernon would do much to smooth and dissipate any difficulty which might arise between himself and her. The philosophical, indulgent, and temperate influence of such a mind had had a sway over himself which he knew to be the most beneficial he had ever felt. It left a painful void even in his own life to feel that that wise and serene friend had for ever passed out of sight and hearing.

Earlier, ever so little earlier, she would have responded to his efforts; the frost of her heart would have melted under the first sunbeam of a kind word; but now the remem-

brance of what his sister had told her was ever dominant. It haunted her night and day ; guided by its cruel indications, she realised a thousand words and signs which were confirmation true. She recollected that her husband's abandonment of the colonial adventuress had been contemporary with the arrival of the Duchess Soria in England. His desire that she should be invited to Ladysrood ; his tone in speaking of her ; his preoccupation and visible anxiety for her pleasure and her presence—all these recurred to her memory with overwhelming and indisputable testimony to the truth of Hilda Sunbury's words.

Hilda Sunbury herself had felt a pang very kindred to remorse when she heard where she stood in the brilliant drawing-room of Ladysrood, that Vernon had been found dead after sunset. Perhaps she had hastened his end ; she knew that she had distressed him, and there was constantly sounding in her ear his bidding, ' Be kind to her.' Had it been kind to have said what she had said to her brother's wife ? Would it not have been well if she had obeyed the dead man's caution and counsel ? Her conscience told her that it would ; and she was

glad to excuse herself to Guilderoy, and hasten from his house on a plea of urgent matters needing her presence at her own home.

She was uneasy at what she had herself done ; she was sensible that it had been neither wise nor laudable ; that whatever she knew or thought she knew should have been kept in her own breast. But she had been unable to help a restless desire to have her share of influence in the life at Ladysrood, and though she was not conscious of it, unity between her brother and his wife would have been intolerable to her. She had never been able to pardon the manner in which, from the very first hour, so very young a woman as Gladys had passively avoided her efforts at direction and tacitly rejected her suggestions. From the moment she had presented her at Court, she had felt that her brother's wife would yield to her in nothing.

‘ Then she is all alone in the world henceforward ! ’ said Aubrey, when he heard of John Vernon's death.

‘ Alone ! How can you talk in such a manner ? ’ said Lady Sunbury, greatly annoyed. In herself she blamed her brother endlessly

and pitilessly; but she would have resented as the greatest of personal insults a hint from any one else that he was ever so slightly blameable.

‘I know no one more entirely alone,’ said Aubrey, very gravely.

‘Will you console her solitude?’ it was on Lady Sunbury’s lips to ask; but the respect she had for her cousin, both as a man and as a statesman, restrained her for once from an unpleasant and imprudent utterance.

‘Her father might possibly have restrained her from follies!’ she observed instead.

‘Is she disposed towards folly?’ asked Aubrey. ‘I have seen few women so young so wise.’

‘You admire all she does!’

‘I confess I think she conducts herself, in what are frequently very difficult circumstances, with great tact, and forbearance very unusual in any one of her years. I think she is far from blind to Evelyn’s caprices, but she has the good sense to affect to be so.’

‘It is the least she can do in return for all he has done for her.’

‘My dear Hilda, what a vulgar sentiment!’

If he had not married her, men quite as good as he would have done so.'

'Would *you*?' asked Lady Sunbury with her most unpleasant expression and accent.

Aubrey raised his languid eyelids and looked her full in the face.

'If I had happened to meet her—yes,' he replied coldly.

'He is in love with her!' thought his cousin, outraged and disgusted; and she began to meditate as to how far it was possible to give any hint of it to Guilderoy.

In a few weeks the solitude grew unendurable to him. He was wholly unused not to have the voices of the world around him, and the constant sight of a sorrow which he could do nothing to relieve depressed and distressed him beyond endurance. A heartless man would have felt it much less, but Guilderoy was never heartless, though he frequently made the hearts of others ache.

Even a great passion, if he had been capable of it, would have found him after its first ecstasies easily diverted from it by the attractions of minor emotions and of passing interests.

Life had been full of pleasant temptations to him, and he had never acquired the habit of avoiding these or of keeping steadfastly to any path.

He could do nothing to console her. She abandoned herself to her grief with a forgetfulness of all else which was in its way as selfish as was his desire to get away from the sight of her grief. Her father had been the centre and support of her whole life; she reproached herself passionately with having ever believed that she was unhappy so long as the sweetness and wisdom of his life were with her.

He grew impatient of seclusion and the sight of sorrow. She was too young to be left by herself, and she had no relatives who could be invited to remain with her. Between his sister and herself he knew that little harmony or sympathy existed.

‘If you would come away somewhere it would distract you; there are many countries you have never seen. I will take you where you choose; a voyage might do much to calm you,’ he said to her one morning in the seventh week after Vernon’s death. But

she could not be persuaded to leave Ladysrood, and made her daily pilgrimage to the grave at Christslea.

‘I cannot go into the world; do not ask me,’ she said again and again to him. ‘Go you, if you wish.’

‘Remember that you are the first to suggest it,’ he replied.

Not pleased at the permission given him, though longing for the liberty which it awarded, he added with hesitation:

‘The world will think it strange if I leave you so soon.’

‘What does that matter?’ she said, unconsciously repeating Socrates’ question: ‘Is it worth while to think so much of the opinion of others?’

‘I have no wish for my friends to suppose that I am unkind or that you are deserted,’ said Guilderoy, impatiently. ‘You have already, my dear, had a certain manner, a certain air, which have suggested as much to some people. I quite understand how wretched you feel under this irreparable loss, but I have never understood why you always looked so little happy before it. Very few

women would quarrel with the life you lead. And if you have any wishes of which I am unaware you have only to name them. They shall be gratified.'

'You are very good.'

'That is not the language which you should use to me. It is language ridiculous in the relations we bear to one another. There is no question of goodness. You are my wife, and it is my pleasure as well as my right to give you whatever it may be in my power to give.'

'Is fidelity in your power?'

She looked him full in the eyes as she spoke. She was standing before him in the sunshine; her black gown fell about her in long slim severe folds, her face was pale with long weeping, and there were dark circles under her eyes. There was a look on her face wistful and yet resolute, pathetic and yet stern.

'Fidelity!' repeated Guilderoy.

It was a strange inquiry, and one which left him at a loss to answer it. 'Who has been talking to her?' he wondered.

She looked at him with the same unchanging gaze, and her eyes tried to read his very soul.

‘Have you been faithful to me?’ she asked. ‘I will believe you if you say that you have.’

‘My dear!’ He was embarrassed and unnerved; he felt his face grow warm; a hot flush rose in his cheeks, his eyes avoided hers, and he hesitated to reply. ‘Why do you ask such questions?’ he said with petulance. ‘No man ever tells the truth in reply to them.’

‘You have told it to me now,’ said Gladys, coldly; and she said nothing more.

She stood quite still, and looked at him; and he avoided her gaze.

‘And the Duchess Soria!’ she asked. ‘Is it true that you wished me to invite her here, because——’

He interrupted her passionately.

‘Hush! I forbid you to speak her name to me!’

‘Why? Because you have loved her?’

‘Because she is the only woman I have really loved in all my life. God help me!’

There was that sound of true and passionate feeling in his voice which she had never heard from him for herself; such a tone is unmistakable, is irresistible; it carries its own truth and

its own secret with it in overwhelming witness to the most unwilling ear.

‘*Vous l’avez voulu !*’ he said with violence. ‘It is always so with women. One spares them—would screen them—would keep them in peace—and they will not be content with that. They will ask and suspect, and prate and irritate, until they are wounded by the very thing they need have never known, but for their own insatiate curiosity, their own restless and unpitying jealousy! It is always so!’

He was passionately angered; angered with himself because he had betrayed a secret which did not only concern himself, and angered with her because she had driven him into one of those positions in which a man must dishonour himself in his own sight, either by falsehood or confession.

‘If you loved her, why did you affect to love me?’ she asked.

Her voice and her attitude were unnaturally calm, but her eyes had a look in them which he did not care to meet.

‘I affected nothing!’ he answered with entire sincerity. ‘I thought I loved you; I

thought at least that I loved you enough to be happy with you. They always say the happiest marriages are passionless. I was entirely honest in all I said to you and in all I said to your father. I never told you that I had not loved other women ; I never told you that I should not love others. No man can give those pledges if he is sincere in what he says.'

He spoke with force and warmth and perfect truth ; whether he were wrong or right in what he said, he believed in his own words, and he intended neither subterfuge nor apology. He honestly regretted the pain which he inflicted, and he was wholly candid in the expressions of his own emotions. They were things which he had long thought, long felt, but which he would never have said to her unless she had forced him to it by injudicious interrogation. He had been willing to keep her in the calm outer courts of courteous intercourse and social conventionalities ; if she had forced her way, despite him, into the hidden recesses of his soul, she could not blame him if she found another name the talisman there and not her own.

'I have never intentionally spoken an

unkind word to you,' he went on after a moment's silence. 'I have been delighted to gratify all fancies and wishes that you ever expressed, or that I could ever divine. You have not had that pliability and amiability which one looked for from one so young; but I have never uttered a word to any living being which could allow them to imagine that I blamed you. I have given you every outward respect, every possible consideration; if you have not known how, or have not cared, to win my affections and my confidence, I think I am justified in saying that is not more my fault than it is yours. Love cannot be stoned, or bullied, or worried into existence or duration. All women forget that too often.'

He rose and walked impatiently to and fro for a few moments.

She stood quite still in the same attitude; she was very pale, otherwise she betrayed no emotion.

'I regret that you have forced me to say those things,' he said, after a moment's silence. 'They are always painful to the speaker and the hearer alike, and no possible good can ever come from agitating and embittering

scenes. Such scenes are the abhorrence of my life. Every man loathes them, and I most of all. In our position no possible good can come from mutual recrimination. Between lovers such disputes may be the resurrection of a buried love. But between people who are bound together merely by honour, interest, and society, they can only produce the most fatal estrangement. I have wished honestly that you should be happy, and if you are not so, it is as much my misfortune as it is yours. It may be also my fault. I do not say that it is not. But it is a fault of temperament, and not of will.'

He waited for some answer from her, but she said nothing.

She stood with one hand resting on the marble column, and she might have been made herself of marble, so still and so cold she seemed.

He waited a moment more, looked at her in hesitation; then, with a bow, passed and left her. He knew that he had said what could not be effaced from her memory, and what must for ever be like a barrier of ice between them. Yet if even in that moment

she had touched his heart or his conscience in any way, if she had shown anything of that warmth and tenderness which are the very life-blood of a woman's love, he would have been ready to meet it so far as his feelings could have been controlled to meet it. He would have been ready to say to her, 'We are both sacrificed to the mistaken laws of the world; let us pity each other and bear with each other, and be friends if we can be nothing more.'

But she had said nothing; and she had kept that attitude of coldness, of disdain, of offence, which had in it neither invitation nor indulgence. She had no compassion because she had no comprehension; and she had been so wholly absorbed in the intensity of her own pain that she had had no knowledge that it might still have been possible to save something from this wreck of all her hopes. When women see the treasure of their lives founder they drown with it. They do not even try to save what they might.

Guilderoy did not seek to explain or to apologise. His conscience was stung, and he was angered with himself for having been

betrayed into such embarrassment. What idiots women were! always seeking to know things which made their misery when known, never letting well alone, never accepting the conventional untruths with which any well-bred man is careful to cover his errors, always breaking with rash steps the thin ice which alone separates them from the bottomless waters of suspicion and jealousy!

He paced to and fro the west terrace with anger and a kind of contrition in his thoughts. Why would she ask those home questions? Why would she try to penetrate his very soul with the gaze of her great, luminous, serious eyes? Why could she not take all he gave her, his kindliness, his respect, his courtesy, his outward observance, his occasional embraces, and not endeavour to probe further into the secrecies of his inner life, and the mysteries of the male passions?

Good heavens! Had she not a life full enough, brilliant enough, envied enough, to occupy her and content her without her requiring his erotic fidelity as though he were some sighing Strephon to her maiden Chloris? Why would women always make themselves

wretched by demanding the impossible, and trying to enter the closed chambers of men's follies?

‘And I was really willing to endeavour to be to her what Vernon would have wished,’ he thought with a sense of injustice done to himself.

Why were women always like that? always rejecting the pearls you brought them because you would not, or could not, give them a roc's egg?

‘Marriage is such a totally different thing to what she thinks it,’ he said to himself. ‘It is a community of interests; a union of externals, a method of continuing the race and of consolidating property; it is not a lifelong worship of Eros with an eternal song of ‘O! Hymen, Hymenæe!’’

He was incensed, and nursed his fiction of injustice to himself, not to look closer at the injustice to her of which his conscience whispered.

It was the same season of the year, almost the same day of the month, as that on which he had first spoken to his sister of his intention to marry John Vernon's daughter. Good

heavens ! Why had he given away liberty and peace and independence of action only because a child had had a lovely face, like a picture by Romney, and because he had had vague impressions that he wished his own sons to reign after him at Ladysrood ? Into what irrevocable imprisonment had not his senses and his sentimentality hurried him !

But who could ever have supposed that a woman so young, and reared in such rural seclusion, would have had so much penetration, so much prescience, so much worldly wisdom, and such obstinate refusal to be deceived ?

‘ I have always been most careful to show her every outward respect,’ he thought ; and it seemed to him that she was unreasonable, and he himself harshly treated. He would always have liked her, always have felt affection for her, if she had only been more facile, more pliant, more easily moulded to what he required.

What could it matter to her if his fancies went elsewhere ? He could not see that it really mattered anything.

If there were any very great scandal, if he left her openly for any one, if he insulted her

in public by admiration for some actress or some adventuress, then he could have understood that she would have felt wronged, and the world would have been with her. But as it was, as he had always been careful to do none of these things, he could not admit to himself that she had any injury at all.

He had remained beside her entirely out of sympathy and good feeling, he had honestly desired to regulate their future lives to be in accord and outward harmony, if in no deeper tenderness, and his only reward had been that she had asked him a direct and intolerable question which he had been too honest a gentleman to answer with a lie!

He was profoundly angered, the more profoundly because his inner consciousness was not blameless. If he had loved her, most probably he would have sought her, have thrown himself at her feet, and confessed his infidelities; but it is only men who love very tenderly who are thus repentant, and he had no kind of love for her. The little he had ever had had died out after six months' possession.

As it was he went into his library, wrote her a brief note, and giving a few orders to his

body-servant to follow him, he had his horse brought round and rode over the moors to the nearest railway. His note merely said :

‘MY DEAR GLADYS,—It will be as well for us not to see one another for a little while. You are mistress of yourself and of Ladysrood. I shall probably go to Aix-les-Bains. If you will address to me at the Embassy in Paris, I will tell them to forward my letters as I am not quite sure whither I may turn my steps. I hope to find you in better health on my return. You cannot doubt my profound sympathy in the loss you have sustained.

‘ Ever yours,

‘ EVELYN.’

The note, when he wrote it, seemed to him a masterpiece of courtesy, kindliness, dignity, and implied rebuke.

It seemed to her, when she received it, the acme of indifference, negligence, heartlessness, and insult. It was in real truth neither the one nor the other, being the mere announcement of the fact of his departure, with the other fact of his annoyance and offence conveyed through its conventional words.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AT that same hour Guilderoy was alone for a few instants with the Duchess Sorìa in one of the wooded paths of Aix.

He had spent his utmost ingenuity in the effort to obtain an unwitnessed interview with her, and had failed, utterly failed, as he had done in England. The place was filled with her acquaintances, men, who were as assiduous as he in devotion to her, constantly surrounded her; and she never received him at her own apartments when she had not her friends about her. She desired to give, and succeeded in giving, him the sense that it were easier to uproot the rocks and hills around than to recover any one of the privileges which he had of his act and will forfeited. His assiduity in attendance on her gave rise to many comments amongst the lingering idlers of the autumn season, which he would have resented

had he dreamed of them. But he did not even spare a thought to the observation of which he was the subject, and his whole mind was centered in the endeavour to break through the barrier of friendly, but never intimate, association with her : a barrier much more difficult to break through than any estrangement or coldness would have created. Those would have afforded permission for remonstrance or entreaty; the serene courtesy with which she invariably received him relegated him without appeal to the position of a mere acquaintance. It was well nigh impossible to reproach a woman whom he had forsaken, for being sufficiently forgiving and kind to condone such an offence, and yet he would have been less discouraged by the most marked resentment than he was by this placid courtesy. It was not like her disposition as he remembered it ; it was not in accordance with anything of her character as he had known it.

Rumour attributed to her the intention of allying herself anew with a Russian of exalted rank, who had followed her to Aix, and who made no secret to the world of his homage ; and Guilderoy suffered all the tortures of that

impotent jealousy which he had once so carelessly inflicted on her, and had pitied so little in her.

In the perplexity and perturbation of his various emotions, his thoughts seldom went to Ladysrood: when they did so they were mingled with as much of displeasure as of self-reproach. The waywardness of his pride made him consider that his wife owed apology to him and must be the first to approach him. Meanwhile he was glad of that cessation of correspondence which to her seemed so tragic and so terrible, but to him appeared but of slight moment. His whole intelligence and volition were for the moment absorbed in the effort to compel some revelation of her real thoughts from the Duchess Sorìa. He was well used to meet on terms of polite indifference women in whose book of life he had written the tenderest pages; to greet with pleasant cordiality those who had parted from him in anguish and tears, or in fury and reproach. But her indifference became to him an hourly increasing torture.

‘Why will you always avoid me?’ he said to her at last in desperation, finding his opportunity after many days.

‘I am not aware that I avoid you,’ she answered. ‘I received you constantly in London, and I would have come to your house of Ladysrood had not your party been broken up by death ; you are unreasonable, my friend.’

‘For God’s sake, do not banish me to that name!’

‘Are you not my friend? Surely you are not my enemy? though perhaps I should be justified if I were yours.’

Guilderoy grew white with anger.

‘Do not let us fence in this useless fashion. You must know, you must have seen, that I feel to you now wholly as of old. Nay, I feel more—ten thousand times more!’

‘What sheer caprice!’

‘Not anyway caprice. It is the entire truth. You, who are so fully aware of your power over men, should be the last to be astonished at it.’

‘I am astonished at no human inconsistencies ; but I confess that, said by you to me, these things seem rather like insult than like homage.’

‘Why?’

‘How can you ask me why? You broke

off your relations with me with scarcely more consideration than if you had been a *rapin d'atelier* and I a sewing girl, and because regrets assail you now, for the results of your own action, you expect me to be touched by your expressions of them !'

'I did not know my own heart.'

'Nay, I think you knew it well enough ; you only obeyed all its most frivolous and faithless instincts. Or, rather, the heart said but very little ; it was the passions which were in question.'

'You are wholly unjust.'

She gave a gesture of impatience.

'Men always consider us unjust to them when we fail to deify their weaknesses.'

'You are unjust when you doubt that my feeling for you was, and is, the strongest of my life.'

'The strongest of *your* life, in which nothing is strong, perhaps,' she said with restrained scorn. 'Why make to me these vain and useless protestations? You took your own way. It is not my fault if it have led you into paths not pleasant to you.'

'If you would only believe in my sincerity and my remorse !'

‘Why should I believe in either? You do not seem to me to know what sincerity or any other deep emotion means. You make love to me and you marry another woman. You tire of that other woman and you imagine that you only love me. It is impossible for any woman to attach much importance to your sentiments or to believe that they can be of any steadfastness or duration.’

He was silent; embarrassed by the consciousness of the truth contained in her accusation, and impressed by his impotency to convince her that nevertheless she did him not injustice.

‘You have had the only great love of my life,’ he said, with emotion. ‘In a moment of ingratitude and blindness I was false to you. I imagined that I could live without you. I have repented my mistake ever since; I have been punished more than you can know or would believe.’

She interrupted him with impatience.

‘Pray do not put any blame on your wife; I admire her exceedingly. You place her in most painful and difficult positions, and for so young a woman she conducts herself in them with great

tact and composure. She is essentially high-bred, and I believe that she deserves a better fate than to go unloved through life ; possibly she will not go unloved !’

‘ For Heaven’s sake do not speak of her !’

‘ Why should I not ? She has behaved admirably to me ; and, as far as I can judge, admirably to you also. I pity her very sincerely. You are incapable of making any woman happy because you are incapable of being true to any.’

‘ I am true to you ! I have always been true to you, except in one mad, ungrateful moment, which I have repented every year of my life ever since !’

She smiled coldly.

‘ The truth has had many variations ! Do you suppose I have been ignorant of all of your distractions ? Your wife may have perhaps, but not I.’

He coloured as she spoke.

‘ They have been mere caprices, mere follies ; none have ever touched my heart. That I swear before Heaven !’

‘ How truly a man’s excuse ! A man always considers it apology enough for incon-

stancy if he can declare that his infidelity has been a mere soulless drunkenness of the senses, for which he ought to blush ! Other women may see excuse in such a plea ; *I do not.*'

'I thought you more lenient, more omniscient.'

'You thought me more credulous. You forget that you taught me a lesson which the most credulous of women could not forget if she would.'

'I made the immense, the irrevocable mistake of putting my heart into my relations with you. The one who does so is always the one who suffers in any relation of that sort. The mistake is rarely mutual.'

He felt a sense of powerlessness which was the acutest pain his life had ever known ; how, in the face of his abandonment, could he ever persuade her to believe that he had loved, and did now love, her more than any other woman he had ever known ?

'We were so happy once !' he said, with a timidity almost boyish.

It seemed to him an insult to her to recall to her memory joys which had been insufficient to sustain and retain his fidelity.

A profound indignation flushed in the depths of her luminous eyes.

‘Spare me that allusion at least!’ she said, with scorn and passion.

She rose from her seat and moved onward. But he stopped her.

‘Tell me one thing,’ he said with breathless agitation. ‘Is it true what they say, that you will accept the hand of the Grand Duke?’

‘You have not the smallest figment of title to ask me such a question,’ she replied with some anger. ‘You have nothing to do with my life, in any way. I do not, however, mind telling you that my experiences of marriage have not been such as to make me inclined to risk another. What could any man give to me that I have not? And I wholly agree with Balzac that marriage is *la plus grande sottise à laquelle l’humanité est sacrifiée*.’ I accepted *your* marriage without reproach. I received and visited your wife. I know nothing more that you could possibly await from me. You have certainly lost all possible title to interrogate me on any subject. You have never seemed to understand that you passed on me the deepest affront that any man can pass on any woman.’

‘ But if you forgave that ? ’

‘ Who said that I forgave ? Not I. It is your own assumption. I neither chastised nor rebuked it, because to do either would have been beneath me. We leave theatrical scenes to women of the theatres. But between silence and pardon there are leagues to traverse ; I have never passed them. Probably I never shall.’

With that she left him and approached a group of acquaintances who were playing a round game of cards in the mid-day sunshine under one of the great pines.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ON that same day, Lady Sunbury arrived at Ladysrood, unannounced, bringing her youngest daughter with her ; a girl not yet in the world.

‘My dear,’ she said affectionately, ‘I saw in the papers that my brother has gone out of England ; it is unpardonable of him to have left you alone at such a time, so young as you are and the world so unpleasant as it is. I have brought Constance to stay with you, and I will stay myself as long as I can. I suppose Evelyn will not be many weeks away. Where has he gone ?’

Gladys answered her with what composure and apparent carelessness she could.

The presence of her sister-in-law was very painful to her. She could not forget that what Hilda Sunbury had told her in the beech-walk on the day of her father’s death had

brought about the scene with Guilderoy which had separated them more hopelessly than they had ever been separated before.

Lady Sunbury was at this moment moved by the most excellent motives, and actuated by a sense of self-blame which was almost remorse. It would have been remorse in a character less certain of its own perfections than was hers. She knew that she had pained and distressed John Vernon needlessly in the last hours of his life, and she heard often in memory those farewell words of his, 'Be kind to her.' She was conscious that she had not been kind to her brother's wife. She knew that she had worried, annoyed, and wounded her many a time, and that in what she had revealed to her concerning the Duchess Sorìa, she had been mainly instrumental in bringing about what her own penetration suspected to be the cause of Guilderoy's sudden departure from England.

She was an admirably conscientious woman, though, like so many conscientious persons, she was wholly ignorant that she was often intensely disagreeable, and even at times very dangerous, from the unwise and irritating

things which her conscience impelled her to say and to do.

In coming to Ladysrood she was sincerely desirous to put the ægis of her own presence there, and that of her young daughter, between Gladys and the evil comments of the world. It had been inconvenient to her to leave her own great house of Illington at that moment, and to sacrifice many important social engagements ; but she had made the sacrifice with the most admirable intentions, and with that great regard for the reputation of the head of her family which Guilderoy had so often, and so hardly tried. But all the purity and integrity of her intentions could not make her presence otherwise than an intense irritation and oppression to her brother's wife.

All wounded animals long to be alone ; and solitude would have been the only possible balm to the wounds of Gladys, stung to the quick as she was by pain, and missing, as she did every hour of her life, the sense of the near presence of her father's wise and gentle influence. The constant sound of Lady Sunbury's voice, reiterating as it did all maxims of worldly wisdom, and shrewd, cold, common sense, became

to her a positive torture which intensified all other suffering in her. The presence even of the young girl, who was impatient of the dulness of Ladysrood, and full of all those artificial and worldly longings which fill the breasts of *débutantes*, was an additional trial to her. Sorrow is bad enough at any time to bear ; but its bitterness is tenfold when we cannot shut ourselves up with it in peace, but must at every moment listen to a never-ending stream of commonplace remarks, and affect sympathy with commonplace desires and regrets. The curiosity of Lady Sunbury, moreover, was keen ; and without descending absolutely to the coarseness of questioning, she endeavoured, by every indirect means in her power, to discover what had passed between Guilderoy and his wife on the subject of Beatrice Sorìa.

But Gladys told her nothing ; and the long, quiet days of the fading summer passed in infinite *ennui* to the guests, and in intolerable weariness of soul to the mistress of Ladysrood. The only peaceful moments which she knew were when she sat alone by the grave of her father on the thyme-grown cliffs above the sea at Christ'slea.

She felt so utterly alone. Whilst he had lived she had thought herself wretched indeed ; but now it seemed to her that no hopeless sorrow could ever have touched her so long as his noble intelligence and wise affection had been there to shield her from her own passions, and console her for their disappointment.

She had not answered the letter which Guilderoy had left for her on the evening of his departure.

At least she had sent no answer. She had written scores of sheets to him, but had burned them all, dissatisfied with their utter inadequacy to describe her own emotions.

And after all what was there to say ? He had married her believing that he would care for her ; and he had found himself unable to do so ; either from his fault or hers, or neither or both. What matter which ? What words could alter that ? What reproach could change, or what entreaty could regain, his heart ? In truth it had never been hers.

She suffered all the tortures which wring the inmost soul of a woman who loves what has been hers, and knows that all its charm, its senses, its time, its emotions, are given to

others, and can never be recalled to her. Men can so easily console themselves for lost passions ; even where their hearts ache, their physical pleasures can so easily be gratified by those who do not touch their hearts, that they cannot understand the wholly irreparable loss that the desertion of her lover is to a woman who can only receive happiness through one alone. He can vary his caprices at will ; but she, if she loves with all her senses and her soul, believes that she will never find any means to fill up the blank made in her whole life by his abandonment.

To the mind of Lady Sunbury the lot of her sister-in-law still seemed perfectly enviable : a great position, unlimited command of money, and the power to do whatever she liked unmolested constituted a fate which to Hilda Sunbury, as to the world, appeared one with which it was hypercriticism and ingratitude indeed not to be content. Well regulated minds, like Lady Sunbury's, cannot conceive why any woman requires more than the tranquil monotony of a blameless life, large houses to rule over, and a purse always filled.

To these excellent minds the senses are

sins, the passions are follies, and the *besoin d'aimer* is wholly unmentionable. Such gross things are believed in and alluded to by poets, they know ; but they think poets mad, and at all events poets are no rule for women who respect themselves.

This opinion, either insinuated or more fully expressed, was the burden of all Lady Sunbury's conversation during her stay at Ladysrood, at all such times as her daughter was not in her presence. She believed, and many virtuous women believe with her, that virtue is like a nail ; only hammer at it often enough and long enough and you must end in driving it into any substance whatever.

She knew the world too well not to know all the temptations and dangers which must surround in it such a woman as Gladys when left alone in the midst of its risks and its seductions ; and on these she dwelt, and on the duties of all women to resist them she was so persistently eloquent, that she raised in the breast of her hearer a passionate longing to fling duty to the winds, and drove her more nearly from patience and self-control than any injury could have done, made her long as she

had never longed for that vengeance of which she had begun of late to dream. While every fibre of her heart was aching, and every pulse of her existence seemed throbbing with pain, she had to endure as best she could the platitudes and the stiff sonorous phrases with which her guest proclaimed the all-sufficing beauties of virtue and self-esteem.

‘If she would but leave me alone!’ she thought; but this is just what women of Lady Sunbury’s type never do.

The days and the weeks passed, and she heard nothing directly from Guilderoy, although he wrote to his steward. His sister came and went, but she left Lady Constance there always, and the discontent of the girl, impatient of her exile from the gay gatherings of the autumn parties at Illington, mingled with her premature worldliness, and undisguised selfishness, were almost as trying to Gladys in one way as the companionship of the mother in another.

The routine of the tedious days became almost unendurable to her; the monotonous repetition of commonplace observations seemed to her like that torture in which a drop of

water was let fall on a prisoner's head every second, until he went mad or died with it.

Lady Sunbury was of too keen an observation not to be well aware of the torment her presence was, but in the cause of duty she never wavered, and she considered it her duty not to leave so young a woman as her brother's wife alone; and she sacrificed herself or her daughter to that conviction with that resolution which made her so trying and so unsympathetic to those whom she benefited.

At such times as Gladys could get away from her, she passed her hours at Christslea, or shut up in the library writing, and then destroying, hundreds of letters to her husband.

Perhaps if all of them could have been sent to him, and he had had the patience to read them, he would have reached more comprehension of her character than he had ever attained. All her aching, wounded, rebellious heart was uttered in them; knowing no other confidant possible she made a confessor of the reams of paper which she spoiled. But she sent nothing of what she wrote. When read over to herself, they all seemed too tender or

too violent, to assert too vehemently or to entreat too piteously.

She had great pride in her, and she could not bring herself to send to him anything which looked like an appeal of the affections. He did not care whether she loved him or not. Why should she tell him that she did?

At times she remembered that he had reproached her with never seeking to win his affections. Was it true that shyness in the first months of her life with him, and pride and jealousy afterwards, had frozen in her warmth which might have won his confidence? She remembered that her father even had charged her with seeming cold.

She was very young still, and she was utterly solitary, and she passed many hours of misery recalling every incident of these past four years, and torturing herself with those vain and cruel wishes which cry out to the past to come back, that we may undo, and unsay, all that has been done and been said in it.

At last she wrote one which satisfied her in so far as it seemed to her to express her sense of indignity and wrong without descending to appeal.

It was worded thus :

‘ After what passed between us on the last day that you were here, it is impossible for me to believe, or for you to pretend, that I am in any kind of way necessary to, or desired in, your life. You have told me, in the most undisguised terms, that you regret that I ever had any association with your life whatever. You cannot regret it more than I do. As I ventured to remind you once before, the act was yours, not mine. The only way in which the mistake of it can be in any measure rectified, is for me to leave you. The little fortune which was left to my father on the day of his death is mine, and is more than enough for all my wants. I only await your permission, which I cannot believe will be refused, to leave Ladysrood, and seek some solitude, where under my maiden name I may endeavour to forget that I ever had the misfortune to become your wife.’

She read this again and again, scanning it carefully and critically, to make sure that it contained no word which could flatter him, or imply in her any infirmity of purpose, or yearning of affection. Her future was wholly

obscure to her ; she did not dare to drag consideration of it into the clear light of reason and actuality. All she felt was a violent longing to cease to be his wife in name, since she had never been so in heart, and to eat his bread, and rule his house, and spend his gold no more. Other women might be content with that purely conventional position ; she was not : he had made life intolerable to her ; let the whole world know that he had done so.

She was no mere meek blind puppet to gratify him by appearing at his side at Court, and bearing children to his name, whilst all the joys and interests and passions of his life were found elsewhere. No doubt he would prefer that she should be one of those patient, passionless, sightless women who would go through all the ceremonies of society beside him, and leave him free, without the world's censure, to find pleasure and sentiment in the arms of others. But she was not one of those—and all that even her father had asked of her was to forbear from avenging desertion by dishonour.

She read the letter again and again, and could find no flaw in it. It asserted only what it was her perfect right to claim.

He could not compel her to stay on in his houses, only that by her presence there he might have more facility for inviting under his roof all those on whom his caprice fastened for the hour.

She signed it 'Gladys Vernon' and sealed the envelope of it with her father's arms.

Then a remembrance came to her of such humiliation, that her white cheeks grew red with the shame of it, where she sat in solitude. She did not know where to address him ; she would have to inquire of his land-agent where he was.

As she paused, looking at the undirected envelope, meditating whether, to avoid such confession of ignorance, she should address it to the English Embassy in Paris, and let it take its chance, the groom of the chambers entered the library.

'Lord Aubrey has arrived, my lady,' said the man, 'and asks if you will receive him.'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

‘My dear Gladys, I had no time to let you know,’ said Aubrey a moment after, ‘for I was uncertain myself until last night that I should be able to accept the invitation of your county to their banquet. I have only two hours to spend with you; but that is better than nothing. You look ill, dear. But that is natural. So irreparable a calamity as yours cannot be borne without suffering, which is in itself an illness.’

She was glad to see him; the frank warm sympathy of his words, the grasp of his hands, the sense of his kindly and staunch sincerity were always precious to her. After the platitudes of Hilda Sunbury, they seemed like a fresh sea-wind after the dull close air of some shut chamber. Yet a certain uneasiness which she had never felt before made her constrained and troubled under the searching and earnest gaze of his eyes. She knew that she had done

what he would blame ; she knew that she had written what he would blame still more.

‘It must be a consolation to you to be absorbed in public life?’ she said wistfully.

‘It takes one out of oneself,’ he replied. ‘All work does so ; but national work most of all.’

‘You have so much to think of,’ she said evasively, ‘you could not be unhappy.’

Aubrey was silent.

‘I have nothing to think of,’ she added, ‘except my father.’

‘Ah, dear ! What did I tell you ? There is no irremediable sorrow except death.’

They were alone in the gardens into which they had strolled. Lady Sunbury was away for a few days, the girl had gone out riding on the moors ; there had been rain in the morning, but the early afternoon was fine though sunless. There was the warm glow of autumnal flowers everywhere.

‘Why is Evelyn away?’ he asked. ‘Have you done that which I besought you not to do ? I hoped to find you drawn nearer to him. He was sincerely afflicted at the loss you sustained.’

‘Yes. He was fond of my father.’

Her voice trembled; the tears rose to her eyes.

‘Well, are the common sorrow should have united you?’

‘He does not even write to me!’ she said with indignation. ‘He only writes to Ward and Brunton.’

They were his land-agent and his house-steward.

‘He probably does not know what to say to you,’ replied Aubrey. ‘When men are in false positions they generally avoid writing. We are all moral cowards, I assure you. He is not more so than the rest of us. We dislike to give pain, and our dislike to doing so usually brings about more pain in the end than if we had frankly grasped the truth at the first.’

‘He is your cousin; it is natural that you should take his part.’

‘I have not deserved that rebuke from you, Gladys.’

There was the scent of wet grass and fallen leaves, and the sound of the fountains came through the perfect silence, monotonous and melodious.

‘Did you ever lose any one you loved greatly?’ she asked him.

‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘I lost one whom I loved immensely; yet for whose loss I was thankful, since her life would have been a greater torture to me than her death was.’

‘That must have been terrible?’

‘There is nothing so terrible.’

She did not ask more. She was absorbed in that selfishness which is begotten in the most generous natures by the suffering of the affections. She could not rouse herself from it to enter into the life of another. Aubrey saw that her thoughts were not with him, and the impulse of confidence which had momentarily moved him was checked.

‘Did you know that he loved the Duchess Sorìa?’ she asked abruptly. The question troubled and embarrassed her companion; he answered with hesitation:

‘Who could be infamous enough to tell you that? It was before his marriage.’

‘It might be before. But he loves her still now; he has never really loved any other woman; he has told me so.’

‘A *boutade*,’ said Aubrey angrily. ‘One

of his innumerable *boutades*. He is like Horace's wayward child :

Porrigis irato puero quum poma ; recusat :
Sume, catelle ; negat : si non des ; optat. . . .'

'That is why he adores her ; she is withdrawn from him. I have never found the fruit that he would court, given or withdrawn,' said Gladys bitterly.

She was thinking of her husband's easy acquiescence in her own withdrawal from him.

'Pardon me, dear,' said Aubrey tenderly ; 'but I think you have never endeavoured to understand his character enough to soothe or influence him. You have loved him no doubt ; but you have given to your love that *âpre* and exacting complexion which alienates any man, and, most of all, a man as self-indulgent and as universally caressed as he. Forgive me if I seem to blame you. I know he has made life difficult for you.'

'Will you read what I have written to him ?'

She took a letter from her pocket, and held it out to him.

'I have written many others and destroyed them. They seemed too insolent. Read this !'

It was the letter which she had written that morning.

Aubrey sat down on a bench under one of the cedars, and read it. She could tell nothing from the expression of his countenance. He folded it up, and gave it back to her.

‘If your father were living, he would not let you send it.’

She coloured ; she knew that already.

‘To send it will be to sever your life forever from Guilderoy’s. Anger is a bad counsellor. You will live on the excitation of anger for a few months ; it is like a drug ; it supplies all the natural forces of life for a time only to leave them utterly prostrate when its effects have passed. You are just now in that state of intense pain and violent indignation in which a woman has before now murdered the man who loved and wronged her. But when the heat and wrath of this hour pass, as they will pass, you will regret it to the last day of your life if, of your own will and accord, you break the bonds of your affections, and make it utterly impossible for them ever to be reunited.’

She was silent. She was seated beside him

on the bench. Her head was turned away, but he could see her emotion in the strong throbbing of the vein of her throat.

‘You write and you speak,’ continued Aubrey, ‘as if he had left you forever; he has intimated no intention whatever of doing so; he has gone away for a few weeks as he has often done before, and you have then thought nothing of it. When he returns, receive him as usual. Be sure that he will appreciate your forbearance and your kindness. Men often seem ungrateful, but I do not think they are often so for real tenderness.’

‘Receive him when he comes from her!’

‘From “her” or any other “her.” Why do you take for granted that he is now the lover of the Duchess Sorìa? Myself, I do not believe that he is. She is a very proud woman, and his rupture with her was public and sudden; the kind of offence which a proud woman never forgives; for she had done nothing to bring it about or to merit it.’

‘And I am to be grateful if she now refuses his homage!’

‘You are perverse, my dear,’ said Aubrey,

sadly. 'I do not tell you to be grateful; I tell you to be generous. They are very different things. And at the risk of wounding you, Gladys, I must confess that what you feel now is much more irritated self-love, than it is love at all.'

She rose impetuously, and walked with quick, uneven steps to and fro upon the grass; her sombre dress enhanced the fairness of her face, the golden glow of her hair, the darkness of her eyes and lashes, as the full light poured down on her through the branches of the trees. She did not look a woman to share the fate of Ariadne. Aubrey looked at her and his vision was troubled, and his calm wisdom and unselfishness were disturbed in their balance. Did his cousin deserve that he should plead thus for him? Did the wanderer, who shunned no Ogygia wherein white arms beckoned to him, merit so much fidelity, so much forbearance?

And yet she loved him. What hope was there for her except in such patience and such pardon as might in time bring her reward?

'May I tear the letter up?' he asked her.

'If you wish,' she said, reluctantly.

‘ And will you promise me not to write any other like it ? ’

‘ I cannot promise that. ’

‘ And yet, dear, I ask the promise more for your sake than his. If you leave him you can wound his pride certainly, and humble him before the world ; but that will be all, for he will seek and find consolation. But if you, of your own act, sever the tie which unites you, you will be for ever miserable, for you will never forgive yourself. ’

She was silent ; her eyes watched the shadows of the leaves swaying upon the grass ; she was unconvinced, angered, mortified, almost sullen. It seemed to her that her wrongs were wide as the universe, and no one pitied them.

At that moment Lady Constance ran down the terrace steps coming from her ride ; she was calling uproariously to the dogs who had been with her ; she brought a boisterous rush of youthful energy and spirits : Gladys felt very old beside her.

They were no more alone, and in half-an-hour he had to take leave of her, for his presence was expected that evening at a political

banquet in the county town some fifty miles away.

‘Promise me, for your father’s sake,’ he murmured as he bade her adieu.

She sighed, and her mouth trembled, but she did not promise. She looked at the fragments of the torn letter lying on the ground : she knew every phrase of it by heart ; she could write it again in ten minutes.

After he had left her she walked to and fro restlessly and wearily in the grey, soft, autumnal afternoon. The silence was unbroken except now and then by the caw of a rook ; the great façade of the house stretched before her, stately and noble, with the greatness on it of a perished time ; the solemn stillness of the woods and moors enveloped it ; there was that in its very beauty and majesty which hurt her more than any unloveliness would have done. She remembered the day when she had come thither first, with all a child’s eager curiosity, a child’s ardent imagination. It was not so very long ago in years ; and yet how old she felt !

What was he doing now ?

That was the thought which tortured her

every hour of the day and night. In absence and uncertainty, distance seems to grow up like the wall of a great prison between us and the one whose face we cannot see, whose voice we cannot hear, and whose time and whose thoughts are given we know not where, only are not, we do know, given to us.

She was jealous of other women—of any woman, of all women—with a passionate physical jealousy which was intolerable pain and as intolerable an humiliation. He had thought her cold because the first few weeks of his early love for her had left with her such ineffable, such undying, remembrance, that the mere caresses of habit were unendurable to her after them. She knew all that ecstasy, ardour, and the might of a master passion, could give; and she had been utterly unable to resign herself to the mere occasional formality of a joyless embrace. With all the intensity of life in her which youth, and strength and perfect health could give to her, she had been utterly unable to endure that passionless position of the mere possible mother of his children, to which he had relegated her. It was because such warmth

and force of passion were in her that she had seemed passionless to him, because she had refused to take from habit what love denied to her. And now all that passion in her felt was the most cruel, the most torturing, of all pain ; the pain of a totally impotent jealousy ; a jealousy which hides itself from public eyes, from pride, but makes wretched every single thought of the brain and impulse of the heart, robs night of sleep, and renders daylight hateful.

Men are intolerant of the jealousy of women, but they might be more indulgent to it than they are if they remembered its excuse. Stendahl has justly said that the pain of jealousy is so intolerable to a woman because it is so wholly impossible for her to follow in absence the life of the man she loves, so wholly impossible for her to measure his sincerity, or to be sure of his truth in any way. The man can watch the woman, can test her in a thousand ways, can haunt her steps and prove her fidelity ; but she can do nothing of this in return. If he chose to lie to her she must be deceived ; and the more loyal, the more delicate, the more generous her nature,

the more are all means of learning the truth of his words and the facts of his actions forbidden to her.

‘*Toujours les délicats souffrent !*’ And this is as true of love as of life.

CHAPTER XL.

THE afternoon was growing dark, and the low red sun was glowing behind dark clouds as she turned to ascend the terrace steps.

The young Constance was sitting disconsolately all alone with the dogs about her.

‘I am afraid you are very dull here,’ said Gladys, as she saw the girl’s attitude.

‘It is as dull as death!’ said the girl pettishly.

Gladys’ face changed, and the look of momentary sympathy passed out of it.

‘I will beg your mother to let you go home,’ she answered. ‘It is very painful to me to feel you are here against your will, and I shall do perfectly well alone.’

‘Why do you not go abroad?’ asked the girl. ‘You might enjoy yourself endlessly. Oh, I know you are in mourning just now ; but

it was just the same when you were not. You never enjoyed anything.'

'Perhaps not,' said Gladys, thinking of the days when she had enjoyed every hour of her existence, on the moors and by the sea, when to feel her boat bound with the tide, and hear the lark sing above the gaze, and watch a nest of young chaffinches in the orchard boughs, or the play of young rabbits on the moorland turf, had been happiness enough for her—such simple natural country-born happiness as this girl had never known.

'He is enjoying himself; why should not you? Nobody wears deep mourning long now, and nobody makes any difference for it while they do,' said Lady Constance, holding up one of the newspapers which lay in her lap, and pointing with her finger to a paragraph in one of them.

Gladys looked involuntarily where she pointed. It was a description of an autumnal party then assembled at one of the great châteaux of France; and amongst the names of the guests were printed those of Guilderoy and the Duchess Sorìa.

'Always those journals!' said Gladys, as she motioned it aside in disgust.

‘ They are very indiscreet, sometimes,’ said the girl cruelly, with a malicious smile.

Gladys said nothing, but passed by her tormentor and went indoors.

‘ What a fool she is to care ! ’ thought Lady Constance.

In the morning very early a mounted messenger brought a letter from Aubrey, which he had written over night before leaving the town.

‘ It is impossible for me to see you yet again, my dear Gladys,’ he wrote, ‘ though I will endeavour to do so next month. Meanwhile I once more entreat you to do nothing rashly. The only possible consolation for us in sorrow is when we are able to feel that we have done nothing to deserve or hasten it. Perfect patience with those we love gives us this solace if it gives us no other. Very likely your wrongs are less grave than you think ; but even if they are more so, still do nothing rashly.

‘ You have a high sense of honour, and having this you must feel that as you accepted the charge of your husband’s good name you must, in honour, do nothing to imperil it.

And forgive me, dear, if I add that in all your expressions, whether written or spoken, I found much more of the evidence of a sense of injury than I found of the unselfishness which is the highest note of love.

‘I am a man, as you know, in whose harassed and busied life neither poetry nor love have any place, but I remember reading, I forget where or how, some lines which have haunted my memory ever since. They are these :

Though you forget,
No word of mine shall mar your pleasure.
Though you forget
You fill'd my barren life with treasure ;
You may withdraw the gift you gave,
You still are queen, I still am slave,
Though you forget.

‘Now it is the heart which says as much as this, even when forsaken, which to my thinking loves ; and no heart which says less than this does love. It may throb with rage, fret with jealousy, smart with pain, but it does not love. What, after all, dear, is any human life that it should exact as its right remembrance from another ?

‘Whether we have that right or not, we are only either wise or tender when we waive

it wholly, and are content to give our devotion without seeking or asking for any recompense whatever. If you give such feeling as this to Evelyn now, some day or other be sure that you will have your reward.

‘Whether he deserves it or not is wholly beside the question. It is our own life, our own character, which should determine the measure and standard of what we give—not those of the person to whom we give it.

‘Pardon me this homily, dear, which I write when I am very fatigued, at long after midnight. I endeavour to say to you what I believe your father would say to you if he were now living. Who knows that he may not stand behind me as I write this, though my gross senses cannot perceive his presence? We know little of life, nothing whatever of death. All things are possible. The only thing which always seems to me utterly impossible is that a great mind can ever die.

‘I am affectionately yours,

‘FRANCIS.’

CHAPTER XLI.

THE essay on Friendship which Aubrey had read one year before, chanced to catch his eye where it lay on one of the library tables at Balfrons a few weeks after he had left Ladysrood; and the sight of it suggested to him a course which would have its drawbacks and its dangers, but which offered to him some chance of being of service to a life which was constantly growing more dear to him, but which, as it did so, awakened all that self-denial which was the strongest quality in his nature.

‘If I love thee what is that to thee?’ he mused. ‘Or to any one?’

It would be for ever a secret locked in his own breast, for his self-control was a force which had never yet failed him.

It was difficult for him to leave England at that moment, for he was in office, and the drudgery of high place seldom relaxes much

even in the months of comparative liberty. But it was possible to get away for a few days without awaking too much comment in that Argus-eyed public which is for ever seeing what does not exist, and the week after he had been at Ladysrood found him in Paris. There he learned that his cousin had ended his visits to French châteaux and had gone to his own palace in Venice. Although, as a rule, he condemned all interference of the kind, and did not even now expect much from it, it still seemed to him that some one should endeavour to recall Guilderoy to his duties, and he saw no one who could do so with any possibility of success unless it were himself. After long and anxious reflection he decided to attempt it.

When he reached Venice, the November day was full of warm and limpid sunshine sparkling on green water, shining marbles, and ruddy canvas. It was towards evening, and Guilderoy was at home; he received his cousin with cordiality, which was more apparent than real, for he felt an uneasy consciousness that Aubrey had not come thither without some especial reason, and some apprehension of its nature moved him.

Aubrey stated, indeed, that he was only there for a few hours and was going to Vienna by way of Udine.

‘I am leaving myself very soon,’ said Guilderoy. ‘I am going southward or I would accompany you.’

‘Southward?’ said Aubrey, and looked him full in the face.

‘Yes,’ replied the other in the tone of a man who is prepared to resent any comment on his statement, and resist any interrogation.

‘Not homeward?’ asked Aubrey.

‘Not at present.’

Aubrey made no further remark, and they dined together, conversing on the political situation in England, and other topics of the hour. After dinner they sat on the balcony which overhung the water above the Rialto bridge; the night was cold but the skies were brilliant with innumerable stars, and a full moon, golden and glorious, shone down on Venice.

‘Which is life?’ thought Aubrey: ‘to dream here under the stars in all this amorous stillness, or to have every hour of the day filled as mine is with the pressure of public business and the conflict of men’s tongues?’

But he did not say this ; he said instead :

‘ You have never asked me if I have seen your wife.’

‘ I am sure that you have, without asking,’ said Guilderoy, almost insolently, for he was extremely angered at what he foresaw that he was about to hear. Aubrey passed over the tone and the words.

‘ I was reading again your essay on Friendship, at Balfrons the other day,’ he said instead. ‘ It is very clever and entirely true. But one thing seemed to me very odd as I read it.’

‘ That I should have written it at all, I should think,’ said Guilderoy.

‘ No ; but that all your admirable remarks lead to so little observance of your own rules in your own relationships. One cannot but see that with your wife——’

‘ What of my wife ? ’ said Guilderoy very angrily. ‘ She is perpetually making me scenes of upbraiding. I cannot live in them.’

‘ But you do not even write to her ? ’

‘ I do not write, because she offended me very gravely.’

‘ Did she offend you without warrant ? ’

‘ I do not say that, but she began reproaches

which would be interminable if one stayed to hear them. She must have complained of me to you, or what would you know ?’

‘Be thankful if she complain to no one but me, my dear Evelyn. And complaint is not the correct word. I asked about you of course, and she confessed that you had left her in anger and that you did not write to her—and that she could only hear where you were through Brunton or Ward.’

Guilderoy was silent.

‘Well,’ said Aubrey, with some hesitation, ‘do you consider that you render her happy ?’

‘I do not admit that any person has the right to ask me such a question,’ he said with increasing anger.

‘I told you I had left my good manners outside the door, as one leaves one’s slippers in Persia,’ said Aubrey. ‘As I have intruded so far without them, I will come a step farther. I am conscious of my rashness, but we were children together, and I will risk offending you. Do you consider that you have done what you could have done to keep the promises you made to John Vernon ?’

Guilderoy moved impatiently. 'What did Vernon ever tell you?'

'He never told me anything. But I am quite sure that you must have promised him infinite consideration for his daughter, or he would never have given her to you. He was not a man to care for rank and fortune.'

'And what would you imply?' asked Guilderoy with great hauteur.

'It is not my habit to imply,' said Aubrey coldly. 'I always say what I mean; and say it as clearly as I can. I mean and I say now, that Vernon would never have given you his daughter if he had foreseen that you would be as inconstant to her as you are.'

'I do not consider,' said Guilderoy, with great difficulty controlling his anger, 'that even our relationship warrants you in such intrusion on my private affairs.'

'Oh, I have said I have left good manners outside the door for the moment,' said Aubrey indifferently. 'There come times in life when one must choose between being discourteous, or being cowardly, and in that dilemma I always choose the former as the lesser fault. I must venture to remind you, if you have

forgotten it, that to leave so young a woman as Gladys all alone is to expose her to a thousand perils.'

Guilderoy reddened slightly, partly with anger, partly with the consciousness that his cousin was right.

'She is very cold, and she is very proud,' he said impatiently. 'Such women are their own protectors.'

'A convenient theory, but not a true one : *Nil Helena peccat* may be fairly said of any woman who is left alone.'

'Are you inclined to act the part of Paris?' said Guilderoy with considerable scorn and insolence, which his cousin forced himself not to resent.

'I am as much like Paris as you are like Menelaus,' he said with admirable good temper. 'But you must be aware, whether you choose to admit it or not, that you invite misfortune when you virtually abandon so young and so lovely a woman as your wife.'

'I do not abandon her in any sense of the word,' said Guilderoy. 'She has everything that my position, my respect, my fortune, can bestow on her. I shall never cease to testify to

her every possible outward regard. I detest the very smallest exhibition to the world of disunion.'

'But you see nothing injurious in the actual existence of it! My dear Guilderoy, can you seriously think that a mere girl like Gladys, always at heart in love with you and not cold (though you imagine her so because you are yourself cold to her), can be expected to be content with nothing more than the conventional pretence of union? Surely, with your vast experience of the sex, you must know them better than that.'

'I cannot help it! She is not sympathetic to me; it is a calamity, not a crime!'

'No woman whom you had married would have been sympathetic to you for more than three months,' thought Aubrey, but he did not say so aloud.

'Have you come here to read me a homily?' continued Guilderoy with impatience and hauteur.

Aubrey looked at him steadfastly.

'That is beyond my pretensions. I am not your keeper. But I frankly admit that I came here to tell you one thing. I was at Ladysrood

for two hours. I found your wife in that state of irritation, suffering, and offence, in which a woman may easily fall at a bound from perfect virtue to utter ruin and self-abandonment. She is young ; she does not inherit her father's philosophy ; she is profoundly unhappy, and I thought that it was only right that you should be made aware of it, for you seem to think that a woman is like one of your Lelys or Reynolds which hang immovable in your family portrait gallery, though you may only glance at them once in twenty years. My dear Evelyn, you have been the lover of innumerable women ; recall all your experiences of the wives of other men ; does not all your knowledge tell you that your own wife is now in a position of the greatest peril which a sense of utter loneliness, and the *besoin d'aimer* ungratified, can create for any one at her dangerous age ?'

Guilderoy did not reply ; he rose and walked up and down the long balcony with impatience and uneasiness. His intelligence and his conscience both made it impossible for him to deny the force of his cousin's suggestions ; and his mind, which was always open to reason

even when his passions obscured it, could not but acknowledge the truth of them. A sudden suspicion also flashed across his thoughts.

‘You do not mean——’ he said abruptly.
‘You do not mean that there is any one——’

‘There is no one yet, certainly,’ replied Aubrey. ‘But how long it may be before that supreme temptation comes to her—who can say? When it does come you cannot blame her. She can with justice say to you, *vous l’avez voulu*. I remind you again : *Nil Helena peccat*.

Guilderoys was silent.

‘I cannot help it,’ he said at last, uneasily.
‘I do not care for her. One cannot feign that feeling.’

‘But why in heaven’s name did you marry her?’

‘I thought I cared. I did care a little while. How can one account for these emotions? My dear Francis, whatever faults I may have, I am never consciously insincere. If I seem to deceive women it is because I deceive myself.’

‘That I entirely believe. But it is the more hopeless for them. Nor can I sympathise with

you in any way. You might have made of her anything you chose if you had taken the trouble.'

Guilderoy was silent.

He was thinking of the days when in the cottage porch at Christslea he had quoted to John Vernon the *et puer est, et nudus Amor*. And how wholly it had been with him as the dead man had predicted!

'He knew me better than I knew myself,' he thought. 'And yet I was quite honest in what I said then, and in what I urged.'

'Yes,' said Aubrey, divining the course of his reflections; 'I believe you are always entirely sincere, though very few people would believe it. But the effect of your changes of feeling is quite as disastrous to others as if you were not. I think your estimate of Gladys is wholly incorrect. I think she would even interest you and attract you if you deigned to occupy yourself with her character. I think she is a woman who would be capable even of making you passionately in love with her, if she had not the irreparable fault of belonging to you. But I have said all that I can possibly claim the right to say—perhaps even more

than I ought to have said. I hope, however, that you will pardon me, and think over what I have suggested. I believe that you would never forgive yourself if, through your neglect, any dishonour came upon your home, or even any very great wrong were done to the memory of a dead man who trusted you.'

Then Aubrey rose, bade him good-night, and quitted him.

'Will it have done any good?' thought Aubrey doubtfully. 'At all events, I have done what little I could do for her.'

His own heart was heavy, for his self-imposed mission had not been accomplished without much pain to himself. Far more willingly, had it been possible to do so, would he have struck the man who could be faithless to her; far more willingly would he have espoused her quarrel with the old rude weapons of violence; but to him they were forbidden by his sense of dignity and duty, of position and of patriotism; and even if they had not been so, they would have been of no earthly service to her. He had little hope that anything would be of service. In endeavouring to influence his cousin he felt like a man who tries to make a solid dyke out

of the shifting sand. Sometimes the dyke is made, but the sea is always there.

He left his cousin the tormented prey of many conflicting emotions, of which the dominant one was self-reproach, although almost as strong a one was anger.

Amidst his self-reproach there was a strong sense of anger against Aubrey, who had presumed to interfere with him, and there was also a vague jealousy. What title had his cousin to espouse the cause of Gladys? What right had he to make himself the confidant of her sorrows, or the champion of her wrongs? Her father might have said all this, and would have had the right to say it; but he did not concede to Aubrey any more right to do so than he would have allowed to any one of the gondoliers then idling at his water-gate.

A great irritation rose up in him at the thought of another man being the consoler and adviser of his wife; and he remembered how constantly Aubrey had found time to visit at Ladysrood in spring or in autumn, and to sit with Gladys in her boudoir in the London house, even in the pressure and hurry of a crowded London season. He had been glad of

it at the time ; he had even constantly thanked his cousin for so much devotion to her interests ; but now this intimacy wore to his eyes a less agreeable and innocent aspect. Not that he suspected for a moment Aubrey of any disloyal intent. Aubrey's visit to himself proved his loyalty, and testified to his candour ; but the idea of his influence on Gladys and of his defence of her was, to him, exceedingly distasteful.

‘ If he were married, should I ever presume to take him to task about his wife ? ’ he thought with strong displeasure. The substance of what Aubrey had said might be correct enough ; it was the fact that he did say it at all which constituted his offence.

Nevertheless the counsels, neither of his friend nor of his conscience, were of weight enough to turn his steps northwards. He left Venice within a few days and passed on to Naples.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

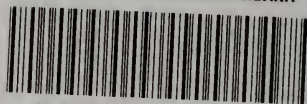
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